

TRAVELLER

DEEP NIGHT REVELATION
THE FAR SIDE OF NOWHERE



SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

TRAVELLER

DEEP NIGHT REVELATION FAR SIDE OF NOWHERE

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T R A V E L L E R INTRODUCTION

The Far Side of Nowhere is the fourth expansion for the *Deepnight Revelation* campaign. It details a region of space the Travellers will have to pass through in order to reach Voidshore and finally Terminus Point. Some of the inhabitants of this region are strangely familiar and unravelling how they came to be in such a remote area is one of the adventures to be had in the Far Side of Nowhere.

This sourcebook assumes the Travellers have generally followed the planned path of the *Deepnight Revelation* expedition, seeking a crossing point on the Great Rift after passing through the Near Side of Yonder. If the Travellers have followed a very different path the Referee can transplant the politics and adventures in this book to a suitable point on the alternative route.

Assuming the planned route has been followed, at least vaguely, the Travellers' next destination is the point designated FSN-X, which lies around 200 parsecs from their landing point on the 'far shore' of the Great Rift. They will pass through an uncharted area of space rather flippantly designated 'the Far Side of Nowhere' since 'middle of nowhere' seemed inadequate. The Travellers may also have found the wreckage of a human-crewed ship on the rift shore. Initially its origins were a mystery but the discovery of humans in the FSN region may not come as a surprise to the Travellers. It does, however, still pose many questions.

Point FSN-X lies over 400 parsecs from the nearest of Charted Space's major civilisations, the Aslan Hierate. The region detailed in this sourcebook is a little nearer to the Hierate but would still require a prodigious effort to reach. There was never any reason to make such an

effort; FSN is just another region of unknown space and there is plenty of that to be explored closer to home. Thus, whilst Aslan explorers may have pushed out a fair way from their borders and the occasional splinter group may have sought a new home, there are no Aslan enclaves this far out.

However, if the mission were to be aborted, this is the shortest way home. A second crossing of the rift is unlikely to be practicable under circumstances where the mission was scrubbed, so limping towards Charted Space by the most direct route would be the only option. It is possible that *Deepnight Revelation* could obtain safe passage through Aslan space but this is by no means guaranteed, especially in areas far from Imperial space. The crew might have to bargain or even fight their way home.

It is around 650 parsecs from FSN-X to Terra. This course would require travelling through Solomani space, which might be even more troublesome than entering the Hierate. A retreat by this route would be a last resort – after all the Imperium and the Solomani Confederation are generally hostile to one another whereas the Hierate is turbulent but not uniformly antagonistic. The distance to Terra is important for another reason; there are humans in the Far Side of Nowhere. The Travellers will soon realise there is little prospect of others following them but for a time it may seem the Solomani could have pushed colonies out much further than previously thought. In fact, they made an attempt to reach Terminus Point but their expedition took a more rimward route and bypassed the FSN region.

REFEREE'S INFORMATION

The *Far Side of Nowhere* contains details of the region known as the Far Side of Nowhere. The Travellers may be expecting to simply transit through this region – and it is always possible they will do exactly that – but what they find here may intrigue them enough to stay a while. The Far Side of Nowhere is very far from Charted Space but there are humans living there in great numbers.

In *The Far Side of Nowhere* the Travellers have a chance to discover the origins of the starship found in *The Crossing* and unravel the mystery of how humans came to be so very far from home. They will experience the dubious pleasures of Tradeport, an independent port at the centre of a web of independent worlds and tread a careful path between the agendas of the region's great powers. There are those who want the Travellers' friendship, others who want to use them as pawns... and everyone wants their ship.

The Travellers will learn of a new threat pushing into the region; a power that uses biological starships. These 'Biologicals' may or may not be connected with the Deepnight Entity but they are mysterious and destructive. In their quest to learn more the Travellers will be forced to deal with raiders, shady merchants and duplicitous emissaries before negotiating safe passage through the region.

SO VERY FAR FROM HOME

Humans have been living in the Far Side of Nowhere for tens of thousands of years. How this came to be is a story going back to the heyday of the Ancients civilisation. Around 305,000 years ago the Ancients were at the height of their power and uplifting or transplanting species from many worlds – notably Terra.

The Ancients were led by a being often referred to as Grandfather (Yaskoydray), who had a vision for his own species and the races they encountered. For reasons that remain unclear, the Ancients civilisation ended abruptly in the Final War; perhaps this was triggered by opposition to the great plan. Grandfather is said to have hunted down his offspring who had allied against him and destroyed them – although some sources suggest he did not manage to find them all. It is not possible for modern scholars to say for certain but what is known is that the Ancients vanished rapidly from the cosmic stage.

BUT WHAT IF THEY...?

As always the Travellers have complete agency in *The Far Side of Nowhere*. They might decide to turn around and head for the galactic core or try to conquer the Aslan Hierate. It is unlikely they will go quite that far off-script but Travellers are strange creatures. The adventure is written in such a way as to nudge the Travellers towards its starting point but railroading them is not desirable.

Some eventualities can be accounted for by moving elements of the setting around. Tradeport, for example, is central to the adventure plot but does not have to be located where the map says. However, if the Travellers find a way to bypass the whole scripted storyline, the Referee has only two choices: dictate that the Travellers do something that triggers the adventure or play out the actions they have chosen to take.

If the Travellers do take a wildly different path they will still encounter elements of the background and may be drawn in elsewhere or the Referee may use parts of the adventure to create others. Or the whole thing could be run as a one-off at some point in the future. It is not possible for adventure writers to predict and plan for every possible decision the Travellers might make; at least not if those decisions are to be in any way meaningful.

Thus, as always, *The Far Side of Nowhere* is a framework rather than a straitjacket. What actually happens in the game is an interaction between the Travellers and the Referee, governed by the rules. Between those rules and this adventure, the Referee has the tools needed to deal with almost anything the Travellers might choose to do in *The Far Side of Nowhere*.

Opposition to Grandfather's plan may have inspired the group that came to the Far Side of Nowhere or perhaps it was fear of what might befall them if they defied Yaskoydray. It is equally possible the project was ordered by Grandfather and remained unfinished due to the Final War. Whatever their motivation, a group of



Ancients set about creating an enclave for themselves. They took species from Earth, including humans, and carried them very far to spinward. Their drive technology was such that multiple trips could be made, enabling them to seed Terran life on many worlds.

Eventually, the Ancients' ship broke down and the crew perished. Her drives still worked but cascading power failures killed the crew. The seeded humans and other species, including a great many Droyne, were left to their own devices. Nearly 5,000 years later a Droyne ship captained by Oyskrusk passed through the region on the way to Terminus Point. They interacted with the societies in the region but by this time most had fallen back to barbarism. Oyskrusk's crew had no time to help their fellow Droyne, who by this time could not be considered Ancients. The Ancients were, after all, a high-technology culture that emerged from among the Droyne whereas these were low-tech neo-barbarians similar to what the Ancients had once been on their homeworld.

The fall of civilisation was rapid in the Far Side of Nowhere. None of the colonised worlds had become fully established and the hugely advanced technology of the Ancients was actually part of the problem. Whereas the abandoned colonists might have been able to figure out low-tech versions of more modest equipment, perhaps bottoming out at an advanced pre-spaceflight level, they were unable to put together the infrastructure required to support and repair the advanced tech they had been

given. Developing mid-tech replacements meant starting from scratch and most colonies collapsed long before anything had been achieved.

With no ships bringing more people and equipment, the isolated worlds of the Far Side of Nowhere went their own way. Most regressed to barbarism, although here and there a technological society flowered for a while. Some of these managed to build primitive spacecraft and explore their solar systems but none regained the stars. During the Years of the Long Silence, as the period between the Final War and the rise of the next starfaring society came to be called, populations expanded and civilisations appeared here and there. By the time of next contact from Charted Space the human and Droyne populations of the region had forgotten their origins.

Contact came around Imperial Year -300. Late in the Long Night, explorers from the Old Earth Union began pushing out in search of new markets and resources. Many of these expeditions came to nothing but one made an unexpected find in a remote backwater system. This was the Ancients' transport, in poor condition but with a salvageable drive. The technology aboard was millennia ahead of anything the Terrans had and had it been used differently, the Long Night might have ended with a resurgent Rule of Man.

However, the discovery was never publicly announced. The backers of the expedition had an ulterior motive in sending out exploration ships; they wanted to get

away from the Old Earth Union and set up their own interstellar state. This was in part due to the political situation, where cut-throat competition between businesses was not at that time a figure of speech. Finding themselves on the losing side of a trade war, it was only a matter of time before they were crushed by enemies not known for their mercy.

The original plan was to set up an industrialised colony well to rimward of the Old Earth Union and from there conduct an economic conquest of any weaker neighbours. It was not an ideal solution, as any new colony would be within striking range if enemies followed from the Union, so when charts were found showing human enclaves far to spinward the plan was amended.

The transport ship was gutted of everything that might be useful, then destroyed to preserve the secrecy of the project, and work began on a flotilla of colonial transports. The goal of finding a new home was overtly stated and apparently not questioned. The project proceeded in plain sight until all the ships were ready, with only a handful of personnel aware of the true scope of the endeavour. Ancients jump drives were secretly fitted to the transports, their existence a closely guarded secret.

Finally the fleet set out, loaded with equipment and personnel. It made its first jumps as planned, then turned aside and began a series of long-range jumps following the Ancients star charts. It was here that things started to go awry; some of the drives malfunctioned and ships were lost. It is quite possible that these ships reached very distant points by way of uncontrolled misjumps but their fate remains unknown. Indeed, back on Earth the entire fleet was written off after contact was lost. Persistent rumours suggested an ambush by rivals intent on eliminating the competition en masse, with denials only reinforcing this impression.

The expedition was never heard from again, and eventually the Old Earth Union was absorbed into the growing Third Imperium. There is probably a one-line footnote in the historical records aboard *Deepnight Revelation*; a reference to a colony mission lost in the silence of the Long Night. However, some ships did reach their destination, more or less.

The expedition was well resourced but internally divided. The common goal, of creating a homeland far beyond the reach of their enemies, fragmented even before arrival in the Far Side of Nowhere. Eventually the decision was reached to spread out, each surviving vessel choosing a different end destination from the Ancients star charts. What they found was very similar in most cases; either habitable but deserted worlds or

planets inhabited by human – and occasionally Droyne – barbarians. The highest Tech Level encountered was on a handful of early industrial worlds and one that had just begun launching rocket-powered spacecraft.

These worlds could not resist the well-equipped newcomers but the conquest did not take the form of an armed invasion. Outright military takeover was virtually impossible with a few hundred invaders, no matter how well armed, unless there was a stable world government to be replaced. With a dispersed ‘barbarian’ population the newcomers could take anything they wanted but were unable to hold down much territory with their own resources. What they could do was to create an enclave and co-opt the local population.

The towns set up by the newcomers were attractive to the locals; they had goods that could not be obtained elsewhere and a standard of living unimaginable with local technology. These towns became city-states, exporting mid-tech equipment to nearby settlements in return for increasing social control. Within a few years there were proto-nations on some worlds; within two decades there were world governments.

These new states developed according to the character of those who founded them, influenced by local values and events that befell the formative years. Fortunes were mixed and over time all of the new states suffered major setbacks. The transport ships suffered misjumps, wore out or were deliberately destroyed in a ‘burning of the boats’ ceremony. Technological capability was inevitably lost but knowledge of what was possible was retained in various ways. Caches of knowledge or equipment were set up and theoretical knowledge was preserved.

The decline of the original proto-states took place over several centuries and not always evenly. Most stabilised at a high industrial level and began climbing back towards starfaring capabilities. By Imperial year 60 the first new spacecraft were being built; 150 years after that a basic jump drive was reverse-engineered from half-remembered concepts and carefully preserved components. In the year 300 there were five worlds that could build starships; a century later they were the centre of interstellar states.

Today, there are multiple large and small powers scattered across an area roughly three sectors by three, all built by the descendants of those who fled the Old Earth Union. Barbarian worlds do still exist but where the newcomers settled they mingled with the local population and created a new culture. This may be puzzling to the Travellers as it shares many

MODERN HUMANS

Modern science has provided the inconvenient fact that humans have only been behaviourally modern for about 40,000 years and that the human ancestors of the Ancients period would have been *Homo Hiedelbergensis* or similar. A few tens of thousands of years after fall of the Ancients, divergent groups of *Homo Heidelbergensis* produced *Homo Sapiens* and *Homo Neanderthalis* – so any humans transplanted off Earth would also be very likely to diverge. This would include the Vilani, Zhodani and all non-Terran humans.

The Traveller universe has never dealt with the question of how likely it is that these transplanted populations would be close to *Homo Sapiens* in development after 300,000 years on an entirely different planet. One simple, if perhaps contrived, answer is that the Ancients made some slight changes to the proto-humans they took and did the same to all of them including the population in Africa that would become *Homo Sapiens*. Groups they did not nudge in this way developed differently, such as *Homo Neanderthalis*. Of course, that raises questions about whether humans are a natural or

modified species, which would send the Solomani (among others) into fits!

A simpler solution is to ignore the whole question. This is a game, after all, not an anthropology textbook. We might decree that ‘in this fictional game universe, humans developed a bit differently to what real-world science tells us’. That nicely gets rid of the problem and is perfectly acceptable in a universe with telepathic people and aliens flying around in starships. The laws of science have already been bent in other areas too.

However, the question remains an intriguing one. If we insert an assumption into the game’s scientific background that the modern form of *Homo Sapiens* is the ‘natural form’ for which the species was headed, it follows that most populations would develop that way. This means humanity is not a modified species and most of the other questions go quietly away. However, we know that some populations on Earth developed differently, for example *Homo Neanderthalis*. Could some of the transplanted proto-human populations also have gone a different way? That raises some interesting possibilities...

common elements with their own. There are significant differences, however. There were virtually no people of Vilani descent in the breakaway group and no Zhodani.

Genetically, the whole population can be traced to Earth around 300,000 years ago. Socially, there are close ties to Old Earth but no hint of modern Solomani (or Imperial) culture. The divided internal politics of the original mission ensured that those ships that survived the trip set up widely separated colonies, which in most cases had no contact with one another for several centuries. These colonies grew apart as they turned into new interstellar states and likely to react differently to the arrival of voyagers from Charted Space.

FURTHER NOTES

The Far Side of Nowhere is in part a scripted adventure and in part a sandbox where the Travellers could adventure for years. The immediate problem and the storyline of the adventure, revolves around a need to repair the jump drive of *Deepnight Revelation*. A solution to this problem presents itself in the form of a non-functional dockyard ship at Tradeport. If the Travellers can fix it up they can cut months off the repair time. Of course, the locals want something in return. This ‘something’ will take the Travellers to

nearby worlds, where they will have to deal with agents of the local powers and an area taken over by the mysterious Biologicals.

The Travellers might decide to ignore or bypass the whole region but will still encounter elements of the adventure as they progress. If they make the repair using their own resources they can refuse to assist Tradeport’s leaders but the Travellers should still encounter the Biologicals on a world they explore. Likewise, the adventure at Hardslog can be transplanted to any desert world.

How much or how little the Travellers make of their findings is entirely up to them. They may want to know more about the Biologicals or the Dual Alliance of humans and Droyne... or the rumoured race of super-Droyne that have been encountered from time-to-time. There is a whole campaign to be played in the Far Side of Nowhere, either by the current Travellers or as a spinoff after the *Deepnight Revelation* campaign is over. In the meantime, the Travellers have a mission to complete and that requires reaching point FSN-X with a functional ship. The adventures in this book present problems but also opportunities. What the Travellers do is up to them.

CHAPTER TWO THE FSN REGION

The Far Side of Nowhere is a loosely designated region stretching from the rimward shore of the Great Rift to the sector containing Point FSN-X. Beyond this lies the region known as Voidshore. The expedition has been naming sectors as it advanced but is now about to enter a region already charted by its inhabitants. Whether the Travellers want to use local names for the sectors or assign their own is entirely their own choice.

The FSN-X Chart shows local names for the sectors, where they have been named, and the relationship between the region and the sectors the Travellers have already passed through. As always this can be adjusted by the Referee to ensure the Travellers encounter the most interesting parts of the region ahead; FSN can be slid a sector or so to either side if the Travellers cross the Great Rift at a different point. Uncharted sectors can be added between any of the sectors on the chart, although it is best if the core region of sectors remains contiguous.

The people of the FSN region gave various names to the surrounding space, in many cases designating areas that did not correspond to a standardised system of sectors. Once contact was re-established, some of these names found their way into common use whilst others were forgotten. The overall theme is drawn rather superficially from European mythology, notably Norse and Greek, with numerous references to hells, underworlds and rivers outside the familiar 'home' sectors.

The two main powers of the region are the Federated Commonwealth of Homeworlds and the Grand Republic. The latter favours Norse mythology for its naming conventions whilst the Commonwealth generally uses names from Greek mythology. These trends are by no means universal; some sectors are named from other mythologies or have acquired names derived from their characteristics rather than mythological whimsy.

					01	02	03	04		
						05	06	07		
				08	09	10	11	12		
				13	14	15	16	17		
			18	19	20	21	22	23		
			24	25	26	27	28	29		
			30	31	32	33	34	35		
							FSN-X			

Bracketed sector designations indicate a sector mostly or wholly composed of open rift, which may or may not have received a name

SECTORS

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Last Prospect | 19. Tir Na Nog |
| 2. Best Prospect | 20. Olympus |
| 3. No Prospect | 21. Bifrost |
| 4. Black Night | 22. Valhol |
| 5. (Crossing) | 23. Hvergelmir |
| 6. (Far Shore) | 24. (Acheron) |
| 7. (Far Shore 2) | 25. Carthago |
| 8. (Annwn) | 26. Arcadia |
| 9. (Baltia) | 27. Troy |
| 10. Brittia | 28. Gimli |
| 11. Lemuria | 29. Niflheim |
| 12. Muspelheim | 30. Lethe |
| 13. Hades | 31. Hubur |
| 14. Harappa | 32. Celadon |
| 15. Atlantis | 33. Naraka |
| 16. Wilderlands | 34. Malvam/FSN-X |
| 17. Ifingr | 35. Elivagar |
| 18. (Styx) | |

CROSSING

The Crossing sector is an area of open rift of little consequence, other than the fact the rift-crossing route runs partially through it.

FAR SHORE

Far Shore is mostly rift, with the majority of its star systems concentrated in the rimward-trailing corner. Explorers from the polities of the FSN region have not pushed out this far, other than a single ill-fated vessel that misjumped right to the edge of the Great Rift.

FAR SHORE 2

Far Shore 2 is a temporary designation assigned by the expedition's cartographers. The sector is about half rift and may contain numerous interesting worlds. However, it is unlikely to be visited since *Deepnight Revelation's* path lies to rimward.

ANNWN

The Annwn sector is named for the underworld in Welsh mythology. This is a common theme in the FSN region; areas beyond the well-travelled core tend to be named for underworlds and hells. Annwn is mostly rift.

BALTIA

Named for a legendary island somewhere off the northern coast of Europe, Baltia is largely unexplored by local polities.

BRITTIA

Brittia is named for another legendary north-European island said to lie off the mouth of the Rhine. Explorers from Atlantis have mapped parts of the sector but are not known to have reached the rift shore.

LEMURIA

The Lemuria sector has been explored in a patchy and uncoordinated manner and *Deepnight Revelation* will be the first ship into some systems. If so, the Travellers will be able to sell cartographic information to the local powers.

MUSPELHEIM

Muspelheim is named for a hostile land of fire in Norse mythology. Little exploration has been undertaken in this direction, making Muspelheim a true frontier for the local powers.

HADES

Hades is part of the spinward frontier. Beyond lies only a thin sliver of worlds before the gulf of the Great Rift is encountered.

HARAPPA

Harappa was named for the ancient Harappan culture of Earth, which lay on the banks of the Indus river. The name was chosen for its connotations; the Indus Valley civilisation was one of the first great cultures of Earth and those who settled in the area considered themselves pre-eminent. The majority of human-inhabited worlds are towards the rimward-trailing end of the sector, with the remainder becoming increasingly 'wild' with distance from the civilised hubs.

ATLANTIS

The Atlantis sector was named for the mythical civilisation written about by Plato. There is a hint of irony about the name; Atlantis never existed and the great civilisation that was expected to flower in this sector also came to nothing. Instead, a scattering of independent powers grew up, each controlling no more than a handful of star systems. The space between these powers is travelled but not regularly or frequently and many systems are lawless. Rumours abound of pirate havens and proxy wars fought on mid-tech worlds but information is patchy at best.

WILDERLANDS

Wilderlands is, as its name suggests, still largely ignored by the local powers. Ships from the Grand Republic sometimes conduct prospecting or long-range trade missions into the rimward half of the sector but the distances involved make most such endeavours unprofitable.

IFINGR

The Ifingr sector is named for a river in Norse mythology, which separated the realm of Asgard from the home of the Giants. It has barely been explored, although there are rumours of a breakaway colony 'beyond the Wilderlands', which might be in the sector.

STYX

Styx is named for a river in the underworld of Greek mythology, following a general trend to adopt names of this sort for the frontier sectors to spinward. The Styx sector is mostly rift.

TIR NA NOG

Tir Na Nog is another mythological otherworld, in this case from Irish mythology. It lies directly to spinward of the Olympus sector and contains a few outposts of the Commonwealth. Tir Na Nog has been fairly well explored but not all of its cartographical data is available in public databases.

OLYMPUS

Olympus is the heartland of the Commonwealth, whose major holdings are mainly on the trailing side. Many worlds are part of the Commonwealth or colonial possessions of members, making Olympus the most settled and civilised of the region... at least at first glance. The Commonwealth's politics can be turbulent, however, and trouble can flare unexpectedly.

BIFROST

Bifrost was named for the mystical bridge connecting worlds in Norse mythology. In one version of the tales, the Norse gods actually lived in the city of Troy and

travelled to Asgard every day over the Bifrost bridge. The sector name was thus chosen to reflect a bridging between Greek and Norse naming traditions of the local powers. The sector contains many independent worlds as well as areas under the control of the Commonwealth and the Grand Republic. It is a hotbed of economic and political manoeuvring and even the occasional interstellar skirmish.

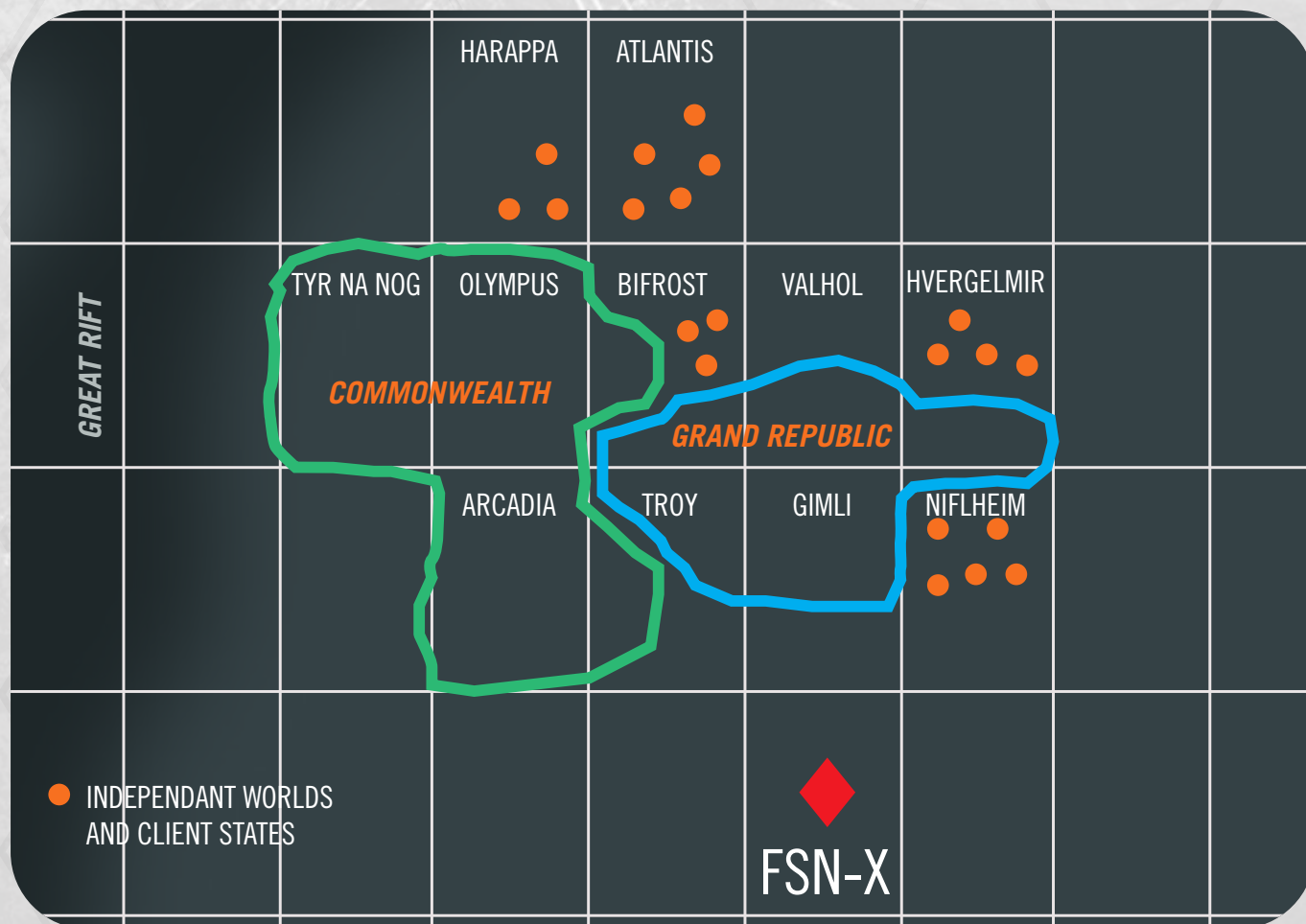
VALHOL

Valhol is named for the 'hall of the slain' in Norse mythology, often rendered as Valhalla. The rimward end lies within the territory of the Grand Republic, which considers the whole sector to be its territory despite having little presence coreward. This may result in friction when *Deepnight Revelation* enters the region.

HVERGELMIR

The Hvergelmir sector is named for the source of all rivers in Norse mythology. The sector lies to trailing of Valhol and has been superficially explored by vessels out of the Grand Republic. It has a few independent worlds along its spinward edge but no significant powers.

POLITIES OF THE REGION



ACHERON

Named for one of the rivers of the Greek underworld, this sector is largely rift. Explorers have pushed out as far as the rift edge in places.

CARTHAGO

Carthago is named for the ancient city of Carthage, famous for its explorers and traders. This is a rather optimistic designation, as the region has received little attention from explorers and remains very much a frontier.

ARCADIA

Arcadia is named for a region of Greece that was said to be the home of the god Pan. The sector is influenced by the Commonwealth; a few of its worlds are members and most have trade links.

TROY

Named for the ancient and semi-mythical city, Troy has multiple starfaring powers, though most are very small. Both the Commonwealth and the Grand Republic are influential in the coreward end of the sector.

GIMLI

In Norse mythology Gimli is the stronghold where the survivors of Ragnarok dwell. The coreward end of the sector is the territory of the Grand Republic, whose strong control creates a safe zone for merchant traffic. This in turn promotes interstellar commerce, allowing the coreward part of the sector to become the most prosperous part of the whole region.

NIFLHEIM

Niflheim is a cold hell in Norse mythology but this uninviting designation has not prevented traders from the Grand Republic pushing out to find new markets among the independent worlds of the sector. Rumours abound of a secret mercantile base – much like the settlers of the region intended to create near Earth – operated by dissidents from the Grand Republic.

LETHE

Lethe is named for another river of the Greek underworld but unlike the two sectors coreward of it, Lethe is not a rift-sector. The shore of the Great Rift lies immediately to spinward, creating a natural frontier the Commonwealth intends to expand up to. At present, however, the sector is undeveloped, with some parts barely explored.

HUBUR

Hubur is named for a river in Mesopotamian mythology, which had to be crossed to allow the dead to enter the underworld. The sector contains the current boundary of exploration to spinward-rimward and is the source of wild tales about biological starships and other strange phenomena.

CELADON

Celadon is named for a mythical river said to be in or near Arcadia. It has seen some exploration from the Commonwealth but is largely unknown.

NARAKA

Naraka is named for the underworld of Indian mythology. Like most other boundary sectors it has been little explored.

MALVAM

Malvam is named for a mythical river in Africa. According to the almost entirely fictional 'history' forming the backstory to the legend of King Arthur, Brutus of Troy resupplied there before voyaging on and eventually founding Britain. The sector contains the point designated FSN-X by the *Deepnight Revelation* expedition.

ELIVAGAR

The Elivagar sector is named for a region of ice-rivers in Norse mythology. It has scarcely been explored, lying to rimward-trailing of the inhabited regions.

PEOPLE OF THE FSN REGION

The Far Side of Nowhere has three common starfaring species, none of which could be considered a major race. Technically, the humans and Droyne of the region belong to races who developed the jump drive for themselves but the people of FSN inherited theirs from the newcomer Terrans. The third starfaring race, the Haix, also obtained their jump drive from this source. Various independent worlds and groupings also poses the capability to build jump drives but these, too, are derived from Terran systems.

One consequence of this is that any jump drive in the FSN region should be compatible with others and also with the drives aboard *Deepnight Revelation*. Components will not be identical but dismantling a locally made drive will yield no big surprises and no new insight into jumpspace physics. Spares for the drives aboard *Deepnight Revelation* can be easily obtained but once the locals realise the Travellers possess more advanced drives than they can build, they will become very interested in obtaining the technology. The Travellers may find themselves at the centre of a frenzy of industrial espionage as soon as word gets out about their vessel's capabilities.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Most people in the FSN region speak a language called Oldarth, which bears a startling resemblance to Anglic. This is due to its common roots. Both are derived from the languages of Terra, notably English, and the word Oldarth is recognisably a corruption of 'Old Earth'. Oldarth has noticeably fewer Vilani influences than

Anglic but the similarities are such that the Travellers can make themselves understood – more or less – wherever they go.

The local populations had many languages of their own when the newcomers from Terra arrived and whilst Oldarth became a desirable second language for anyone hoping to profit from association with the new arrivals, the dialects and languages of many worlds have survived in regions where there is less interstellar contact. It is not uncommon to find planetary populations unfamiliar with Oldarth, except at starports where it is necessary.

Cultural influences followed a similar pattern. Worlds isolated for millennia developed their own culture and possessed a rich history when the newcomers arrived from Terra. These local cultures survive but the Terrans rapidly became the top echelon of society and followed their own cultural practices that influenced the local population over time. Now, over a 1,000 years later, the 'interstellar culture' of the region is heavily based on traditions and memories from Earth up to the departure of the newcomers' mission. The Travellers will encounter distorted versions of Terran myths – or could it be their own versions are a distortion?

The Travellers will note a preference for traditional Terran names for ships and places, heavily influenced by Greek and Norse mythology. It may seem strange, after journeying for years away from Charted Space, to encounter a frigate named after a Rule of Man admiral or to dock at New Fenris Highport. Yet just as names and concepts will be familiar for the most part, there are some totally unknown elements drawn from local history. The Far Side of Nowhere is familiar, yet different.

Languages of FSN

LANGUAGE	WHERE SPOKEN	NOTES
Oldarth	The most widely spoken language in the region, either as a primary tongue (such as within the Commonwealth and the Grand Republic) or as a second language.	Any native speaker of Anglic can be considered to have Language (Oldarth) 0.
Oynprith	Droyne worlds	Oynprith spoken in the FSN region is almost identical to the Droyne language of Charted Space.
Kenvab	Kenvab is a 'secret language' used on a few worlds to convey important messages and information. It is known to only a very few.	Kenvab is derived from a mix of Oldarth and Oynprith but so distorted that it is incomprehensible to outsiders.

CURRENCY

There are two primary currencies in use throughout the region. The first and commonest is the Commonwealth Credit. It is named after the currency of the Rule of Man and retains many of its characteristics. Commonwealth Credits (usually just known as Credits) are issued in electronic and physical currency forms, although arguably both are electronic in nature since the Credit represents promissory spending power drawn on the banks of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Credit is popular even far beyond the borders of the Commonwealth itself, largely for its reliability and stability. It is not tied to precious materials or physical assets but to the economic output of certain key worlds. Whilst this does fluctuate, the Commonwealth as a whole is very wealthy and the fortunes of one world are counterbalanced by others. In theory, a Credit represents the ability to buy goods and services at one of the seven main economic centres of the Commonwealth and this capability can be transferred between individuals and organisations using currency.

Local transactions are generally performed electronically but where physical currency is needed ceramic plaques inset with electronic circuits are used. These can be left 'open', permitting the Credit plaque to be used by anyone who possesses it, or electronically 'closed' so that only certain individuals are authorised to use them. It is common to lodge a sum in closed Credit plaques with a financial institution in return for local funds, with the plaques' electronic identifier codes changed to reflect new ownership as they are drawn upon. At the end of a visit the Traveller simply takes back the unused plaques, converting any partial denominations into whatever currency seems most apt. For smaller transactions open low-denomination plaques and coins are generally used, although electronic transfers are far more common in starports and high-technology cities.

The other common currency is issued by the Grand Republic, which at times has flatly refused to trade in Credits at all. More commonly Credits are accepted but must be converted into the Grand Republic's own currency. This has the rather grandiose title of Grand Republican Gold Standard Trade Dollar and is far more commonly known as the Teedy (from TD, for Trade Dollar).

Teedies are issued in physical form as coins and whilst the Grand Republic makes extensive use of electronic transfers there is a general preference for cash at all levels. Trade Dollars are made from an alloy known as 'dollar gold', which contains some gold as well as

platinum and silver, plus other materials. The TD is very hard to counterfeit at local Tech Levels, with patterns of different density materials embedded within a coin.

Despite being made from precious materials the TD is a promissory currency just like the Credit, drawing upon funds guaranteed by reserves of precious materials held at well-protected locations in the Grand Republic. The value of a TD fluctuates more than that of a Credit but the Grand Republic's currency is still popular beyond its borders as a more stable medium than many individual worlds can issue. There are many who swear they prefer Trade Dollars because they just feel more like money. Slamming down a handful of gold coins – whether they are small 1-dollar discs or big million-dollar 'Grand Angels' as they are known – has a feeling to it that the Grand Republic's traders and citizens enjoy. Indeed, the handling of physical money is an important part of their culture and intertwined in many social rituals.

TECHNOLOGY

Technological sophistication varies considerably across the region. There are many 'barbarian' planets where most or all of the local population lives at TLO-2, sometimes with enclaves of higher-technology offworlders. Most independent worlds have a sustainable local Tech Level of 4-8, with higher-tech offworld goods available in small quantities to the very rich. Starfaring societies and major economic players are typically TL9-11, with TL12 the highest available in the region. Both the Grand Republic and the Commonwealth enjoy TL12 across their core worlds, with outposts and possessions typically supplied with enough TL12 equipment to support their needs.

Higher technologies are heavily influenced by the practices of the Old Earth Union during the late Long Night period, since this was the source of all the high tech equipment brought to the FSN regions and from which all local high technology was derived. This is filtered through local preferences and there are distinct differences between the way the Commonwealth builds and the way the Grand Republic approaches the same tasks. This is largely aesthetics and ergonomics at work, however; the underlying methods are much the same.

Worlds that have had little offworld contact are unlikely to possess technology in excess of TL5. Designs for common items vary more among these worlds as years of isolation have led to differing approaches and preferences. In a few cases offworld technology has been adopted by a minor power but modified to fit with local aesthetics.

BRUTES (HUMANS)

On some worlds, conditions were particularly harsh for the seeded populations and as soon as the Ancients equipment wore out the colonists were exposed to the full savagery of nature. In some cases humanity rose to the challenge with cooperation and tool-use, a winning combination in Charted Space as well as FSN. Where this was not enough, natural selection favoured the big and tough over smart toolmakers. A few worlds therefore have populations of what are unkindly known as Brutes.

Brutes are predisposed to develop powerful musculature, usually at the expense of intellect. The effect is not enormous but humans of Brutish stock gain STR+2 and END+1. When rolling INT, a Brute treats a 6 as a 5 on each dice, giving a basic INT range of 2–10 rather than 2–12.

Brutes are not necessarily uncivilised; the arrival of the newcomers created technological societies that Brutes are perfectly capable of functioning in. A Brute may stand out due to big muscles and heavy bones but learning and art are cultural, not physical.

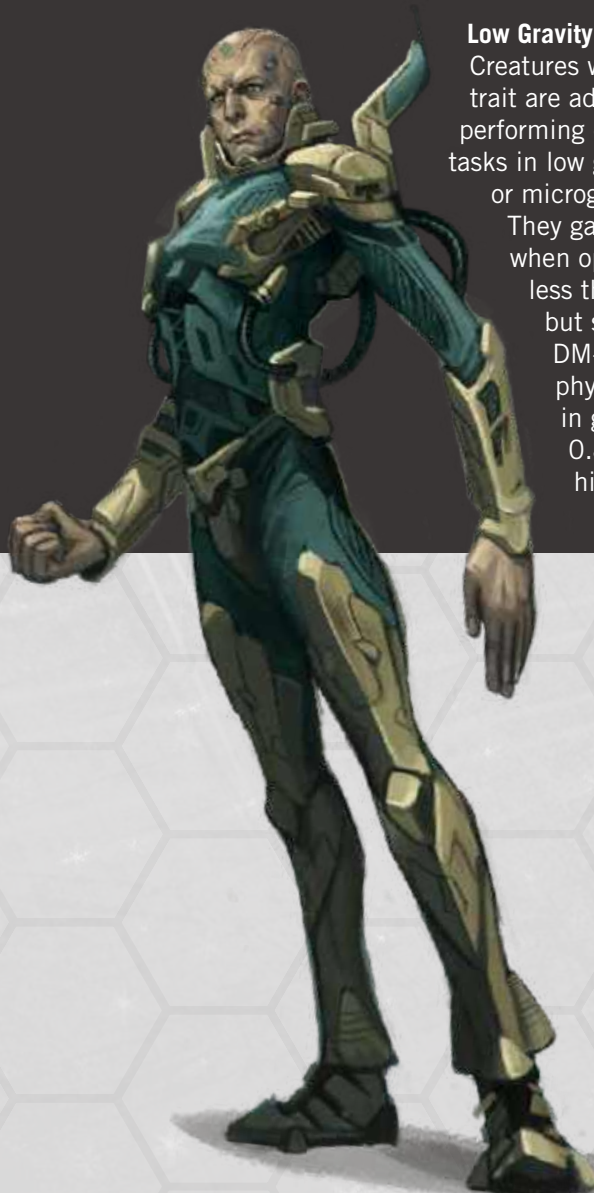


LOWGEES (HUMANS)

A few settled worlds were not really suitable for long-term habitation without technological assistance. The human populations there evolved a tendency to be lightly built and dextrous, often at the expense of physical strength. Lowgees, as such people are known, often have long limbs and a barrel chest to house enlarged lungs – low gravity is often accompanied by a thin atmosphere.

The coming of interstellar voyagers provided Lowgee populations with a new occupation to which they were extremely well suited. Large numbers left their homeworlds for jobs in space or at installations where they had to work in low gravity conditions. Lowgees can now be found across most of the region although tend not to settle on worlds with gravity above 0.8g.

Lowgees gain DEX+2 but treat a 6 as a 5 when rolling for STR and END. In addition they possess the Low-Gravity Adaption trait.



Low Gravity Adaption:
Creatures with this trait are adept at performing delicate tasks in low gravity or microgravity. They gain DM+2 when operating in less than 0.2g but suffer DM-1 to all physical tasks in gravity of 0.8g or higher.

HUMANS

The most common people in the Far Side of Nowhere are humans, all of whom are derived from Terran stock. However, there are some significant variances between groups of humans. The early populations were transplanted by the Ancients, then developed in isolation for 300,000 years. The new population who arrived around 1,400 years ago brought with them a broad selection of genetic differences, and permitted interbreeding between the isolated populations, but a few hundred years has not been enough to eliminate the genetic drift of previous millennia. The new arrivals bred into a large existing population, causing relatively small changes.

The factors that caused variance in skin and hair pigmentation on Earth worked in exactly the same way here, although the smaller gene pool on most worlds seeded by the Ancients had an effect. Humans in the FSN region therefore display all the usual variance in skin, hair and eye colour found elsewhere, although planetary populations tend to be more consistent than in Charted Space where interstellar travel is commonplace.

The average human in the FSN region is little different to someone from Charted Space. However, some divergent populations do exist.

DROYNE

Significant numbers of Droyne were settled on various worlds, sometimes in conjunction with humans and sometimes not. These Droyne regressed to barbarism just like the humans of the region and may have lost the ability to caste as occurred elsewhere. However, whilst the expedition led by Oyskrusk was unable to provide technological assistance they were able to teach local Droyne populations to select their castes. Two Droyne worlds were helped in this way and once interstellar travel was re-established others were found and what amounted to a spiritual uplift programme began.

The uplift was not altogether successful. Some Droyne populations rejected the casteing process, either wilfully or due to some innate resistance. These populations are now very similar to the Chirpers of Charted Space. Another group, inhabiting the world of Eynastyusk, has diverged very strongly from the Droyne norm. They have

evolved into a casteless version of the Droyne, which appears to exhibit most of the strengths of each caste in every individual. It is not known why this happened, nor how, nor if these 'super-Droyne' are capable of interbreeding with normal Droyne.

Droyne worlds, including Eynastyusk, speak Oynprith which is virtually identical to the language spoken by the Droyne of Charted Space. It is not known why this language seems immune to linguistic drift but the same phenomenon has been observed in Charted Space. Worlds that have not had contact for centuries or millennia somehow retain near-identical language structure and idiom.

The majority of Droyne in the FSN region follow the usual rules for Traveller creation, although those hailing from Eynastyusk do not caste. All characteristics except SOC are rolled on 2D+3 rather than the usual 2D, giving a range of 5–15 instead of the usual 2–12, and an average of 10. This places the Droyne of Eynastyusk far above the average for most species in all fields of endeavour. Their psionic potential is no different to other Droyne however.



INTERSTELLAR COMMERCE AND POWER PROJECTION

The politics of the FSN region are much smaller than those of Charted Space, so their naval budgets are, of necessity, vastly smaller. This in turn translates to smaller vessels, making the FSN region what might be referred to as a 'small ship universe'. A vessel the size of *Deepnight Revelation* would be a prodigious thing even if she were not a technological marvel. Even 'demilitarised', *Deepnight Revelation* outguns most interstellar powers in this part of the galaxy.

The pattern of power and influence in the FSN region is one of hubs, areas of influence and the wildernesses in between. Speed of information transfer is only one facet of this phenomenon; the delays inherent in projecting military power over a long distance and the inefficiency of interstellar trade compared to in-system trade are also highly significant. A jump drive is an expensive device and of course it must be accompanied by sufficient fuel tankage to support a jump. This is tonnage lost to other facets of a vessel's operations – weapons and defences for a military ship; cargo space for a commercial vessel. It is thus cheaper, more efficient, or both, to build vessels for in-system work only. Trade tends to operate in zones – on-planet, in-system, local and long-range – with vessels and vehicles appropriate to each zone in use.

There is a lot less money to be made moving goods than could be delivered by truck or train in a space vessel and likewise it is inefficient to waste a jump-capable vessel on an in-system run where a cheaper craft could carry more passengers or goods. Thus the major ports are hubs for trade of all levels, with long-range trade coming in aboard large freighters and smaller cargoes spreading out from there.

A local cluster will be served by smaller cargo vessels, although two major worlds might have a regular bulk freighting service between them. The general rule is that trade spreads out from the major hubs, with local ports in the cluster of worlds near the trade hub receiving their goods aboard smaller vessels and from those ports in-system and on-planet trade is carried out

by local hauliers. There are exceptions of course; where economically viable, there will be large-scale, fast or frequent trade. Thus a major industrial centre might receive frequent visits from bulk cargo ships but little general trade.

Similarly, it is not possible to maintain highly centralised control over star systems that are several weeks' travel away. Organisations beyond a certain size tend to be decentralised. This does not mean that an interstellar state cannot be oppressive, merely that local governors must make their own decisions and deal with threats as they arise. Help is at least a couple of weeks away; the time taken for a fast courier ship to reach a neighbouring system and bring assistance. More remote areas may be several weeks away from the nearest assistance even if a courier ship is available – and it may not be.

Thus the usual system is for power to be concentrated, like economic activity, in key star systems with areas of lesser importance in between. The governments or governors of these systems typically have a fair amount of autonomy but are held in balance by the likelihood of sanctions or enforcement action if they stray too far from acceptable conduct.

Centralisation of power into hubs is also common in military and naval organisation. The time taken to send a naval ship to a remote system may be much longer than the period it can remain there before crew fatigue and exhaustion of supplies forces it to return home. By way of example, if a star system is four jumps from the nearest naval base then it will take four weeks (plus time for refuelling and drive calibration) to get the ship there and four weeks home. Putting a warship in that system for two weeks requires a 10-week deployment even if the vessel does nothing else en route. Ten weeks aboard a starship will fatigue the crew and affect morale, so downtime for maintenance, training and shore leave must be added. That two-week patrol will absorb a warship for at least three months.

As a rule, naval forces are concentrated in key systems and these are often largely composed of non-jump-capable vessels, which do not need to carry expensive jump drives and large amounts of fuel. Such a vessel can be cheaper for the same capability or carry more weaponry on the same tonnage. Key systems are well defended and regularly patrolled by sublight (non-jump-capable) vessels, whilst jump-capable vessels are available to patrol more distant areas or respond to threats. Small forward bases enable patrol assets to be supported in frontier regions and reduce transit times but assets will still be spread ever more thinly the further from the key systems they go.

The main consequence of these economic and logistical factors is that assets and population tend to be concentrated into the 'best' star systems such as those with good natural resources, a habitable mainworld, or which lie on a major trade route. In between the hub worlds, and especially off the main trade routes, law enforcement can be patchy and starship operations more hazardous. These backwater systems may not see a naval vessel for years on end, making them a dangerous but lucrative environment for smaller independent vessels.

STARSHIPS AND SPACECRAFT

A variety of official and semi-official terminology is in use throughout the FSN region to describe space vessels. Some terms are applied quite loosely; others have very specific meanings.

The term vessel is applied to any craft capable of moving under its own power and supporting crew or passengers. Technically, the term could be applied to mobile installations such as mining bases or military fortresses, which have manoeuvre drives for relocation. Since these installations do not normally act like space vessels, remaining in place for extended periods, they are not normally considered to be vessels except when underway.

A craft, or spacecraft, is any non-jump-capable vessel. Sometimes the distinction of small craft is used for sub-100-ton craft, with the term big craft used for those of 100 tons and over. More commonly, larger spacecraft are referred to as space vessels or large spacecraft. All vessels referred to as craft are non-jump capable.

A boat is a small vessel intended to be carried aboard an installation or vessel. Most boats are smaller than 100 tons and thus fit the designation of small craft but some may be in the 100–400 ton range or occasionally even larger. Some of these larger boats may be jump-capable

but are not considered to be starships as they are not designed for long-term independent operations.

Thus an exploration ship might carry several jump-capable boats to explore nearby star systems while it studies its present location in more detail, or an installation might have a flotilla of messenger boats for routine communications with nearby systems. Jump-capable boats tend to be cramped and not very crew-friendly as their personnel do not live on board. Instead they are berthed aboard the parent vessel or installation, spending an uncomfortable week aboard the boat before reaching its destination.

Some craft and boats have specialised roles that usually qualify them for a specific title. Fighters are a good example – typically they have no amenities for the pilot beyond a cockpit, making the craft entirely unsuitable for long missions. Specialised craft include gunboats (larger armed craft, some equivalent in size to a small starship), assault shuttles, small tugs and lifeboats.

Other small craft roles are more general and do not necessarily correspond to the specific terms common in Charted Space. Shuttles are designed to operate between vessels or between a world's surface and an installation or ship in orbit. Almost any craft can function as a shuttle, although there are also numerous specific shuttle designs. The standard shuttle of Charted Space is only one possible design.

Likewise, the term cutter has a different meaning away from Charted Space. There, it has become associated with a 50-ton modular craft that came to dominate the mid-size small craft marketplace. In local parlance, a cutter is a non-jump-capable military or security vessel large enough to carry out in-system patrols of considerable duration. The term pinnacle has also become associated with a particular design in Charted Space but in the FSN region it usually refers to a jump-capable boat carried by a larger vessel.

Larger sublight craft are typically referred to as space vessels and sometimes by specific designation. In-system cargo and passenger craft are often known as barges, with bulk transports sometimes referred to as scows. The latter term is normally reserved for industrial ships such as ore transports serving an asteroid mining operation.

Jump-capable vessels intended for independent operations are referred to as starships. They usually have a designation associated with their role and any vessel with the word 'ship' in its title is capable of moving between star systems. Thus a scientific research vessel might or might not be jump-capable but a laboratory ship definitely is.



Passenger ships may be referred to as liners, although this term is usually reserved for high-quality vessels. A general cargo/freight vessel is typically called a merchant ship or merchant vessel, with large cargo ships (over 5,000 tons) being known as freighters. A freightliner is a combination passenger/freight ship and may not be of a quality normally associated with the term liner.

Smaller cargo or general-operations vessels are often termed transports, traders or small merchant vessels. These designations apply to both sublight and jump capable ships, although the terms free trader and tramp trader are normally only applied to jump-capable small merchant ships. Free trader, in particular, has other connotations beyond the ship's role, indicating a method of operation as well as vessel type.

Military ships also follow a generally universal system of designations. A warship is any vessel intended for combat missions – which can include tenders and carriers that do not engage enemies directly – as well as vessels designed for planetary bombardment. A combatant, on the other hand, is a vessel intended for direct engagement of enemy vessels. Thus a gunboat

carrier is a warship but not a combatant; its complement of gunboats are combatants but not warships (because they are incapable of jump) and an escorting destroyer is both warship and combatant. Various support vessels such as tankers, logistics ships, troop carriers, naval tugs and couriers are used by navies. These are not warships, although they may be armed for self-defence.

Warships and combatants are defined by role and size. Sublight combatants smaller than 1,000 tons are known as gunboats (and sometimes gunships, although this usage is incorrect), with combatants of over 1,000 tons usually known as monitors after an ancient class of Terran ships that were potent but unsuitable for anything but coastal and riverine operations. Monitors are typically subdivided by size, with vessels in the 1,000–5,000 ton range known as light monitors and those in the 5,000–25,000 ton range as heavy monitors. Battle monitors, of over 25,000 tons displacement, are uncommon.

A monitor type of vessel intended to be carried by a parent ship and deployed for action is termed a rider whilst it is operating in conjunction with a carrier or tender. Any rider can function as a monitor – indeed, some polities use tenders to ferry riders into a threatened

system to function as monitors after the tender withdraws. The same ship can be either a monitor or a rider depending on whether or not it is being carried and some powers do not make any distinction between the types. This is because either all their monitors are designed to be conveyed by a tender, when necessary, or because they do not use tenders at all.

Military vessels in the sub-1,000 ton class are usually referred to as minor warships. A minor warship intended to directly engage the enemy as its main role will typically be referred to as a corvette. Non-specialist minor warships, or those with a specialist role that is not direct combat, are usually known as sloops.

Military vessels in the 1,000–5,000 ton range are known as small combatants or small warships. Those whose primary role is combat and which are highly specialised are normally termed destroyers, whilst those intended for multirole operations or which have a non-combat specialism are usually designated as frigates. Most small escort or patrol ships are frigates with a broad range of capabilities but other kinds of frigate exist such as planetary bombardment, electronic warfare or minelaying vessels. A small warship that carries numerous fighters might loosely be termed a pocket carrier but more correctly it is a fighter-equipped frigate.

Military vessels in the 5,000-25,000 ton range are known as large warships, large combatants, or as cruisers. Typically a light cruiser will be around 10,000 tons displacement and a heavy cruiser about 20,000. Some cruisers carry a mixed armament, others are more specialist and the ship's designation is usually based on its role. Thus a general-purpose large warship might be termed a heavy cruiser whilst one of the same tonnage with a heavily missile oriented armament would be a missile cruiser.

Battleships, or at least vessels with that designation, are not normally built by the powers of the region. The capital ships of the Commonwealth are carriers or tenders, whilst the Grand Republic favours vessels that might be called a battleship elsewhere but which are designated capital cruisers, flag cruisers or battlecruisers depending on their size and role.

Those navies using vessels that carry subordinate craft usually subdivide between carriers and tenders. A carrier is always a warship, although designs vary from carrier-frigates with a handful of fighters aboard to huge battle carriers capable of deploying large forces of fighters and gunboats. In common usage, a capital ship-sized carrier is known as a fleet or battle carrier (the latter term typically used for carriers with a very powerful armament of their own), cruiser-sized carriers are heavy or light depending on how they correspond to cruiser tonnages and smaller carriers are more often known as fighter-equipped or aviation-capable frigates. The term 'aviation' in this case has been retained from Terran maritime navies and has changed in its meaning over the centuries. Aviation now refers to the fighters, gunboats and other craft carried by a warship or installation, so a carrier's fighter complement may be referred to as its Aviation Group.

A tender typically carries at least some of its craft on external grapples and may not be a warship. For example, an exploration tender might carry several scout ships or a communications tender may carry message boats. Most rider forces are conveyed externally by tenders, as the space required to dock a monitor is considerable. This leads to one other common difference between tenders and carriers – a carrier's craft crews are berthed aboard the carrier whereas in some cases a tender's subordinate craft retain their crews in their own quarters.

Some extremely large pseudo-carriers exist but these are more like mobile installations than starships. One example is the Mobile Interstellar Bases deployed by the Commonwealth. These are in many ways a jump-capable starport or naval base that carries a powerful force of riders and gunboats. Similarly, the fortresses used by some worlds for defence have manoeuvre drives for local mobility but are not really spacecraft. Their aviation groups are similar to those of a carrier but a fortress is more about protecting its craft and weapons than carrying them to a battle zone.

C H A P T E R F I V E

THE FEDERATED COMMONWEALTH OF HOMEWORLDS

The Commonwealth had its origins in an agreement between three groups of Terrans during the transit to the FSN region. As internal divisions forced the expedition to disperse these three agreed to respect their differences but maintain general goodwill towards one another. They chose destination worlds far enough apart to permit independent growth and set out to build their own futures. All three made it to their chosen destination and began the planned economic takeover of the local 'barbarian' population. All three suffered severe setbacks as a result of the vagaries of fate and the planned interstellar alliance did not materialise. Contact was maintained for a few years using the long-range transports that had brought them from Earth but soon local needs made the ships unavailable and in due course they wore out.

The three worlds settled by the Commonwealth's founders were named New Fenris, Avalon and Maine. The groups that settled them were different in character and their methods varied. All succeeded in gaining control of their world and creating a dominant culture that survived the inevitable technological slump and, in due course, all three ventured back into space. Recontact was not a priority for Avalon, whose leaders wanted to build their own powerbase before going to find former friends who might no longer be well disposed towards them.

Maine flowered early but was in the throes of civil war when ships from New Fenris arrived. Former friendship was one thing but New Fenris saw a chance to annex a developed world. Forces from New Fenris launched an invasion that quickly captured all major governmental centres then stalled amid a quagmire of popular resistance. After years bogged down at the end of an interstellar supply line, New Fenris agreed a negotiated withdrawal and reinvented itself as peacemaker. The invasion was sold to friend and foe alike – and by both sides – as an intervention to restore order.

The polite fiction cost New Fenris a few shiploads of equipment and an infrastructure rebuilding project but by the time the last Fenris troops pulled out Maine and New Fenris were – officially at least – friends and allies. Contact with Avalon came a little later, catching Avalon at a time when it was over-stretched trying to support

all the colonies it had landgrabbed. An alliance was a logical step for all three, although how sincerely it was meant is an open question.

Contact with Endeavour, settled by another Terran ship, provided a test for the alliance. Endeavour was suffering the effects of a series of natural disasters and on the brink of collapse. All three powers saw opportunities and could perhaps have exploited them but there was no way to know whether the allies would respect the gains made by whichever of them achieved the greatest success. The fragile balance of power and fear of conflict kept all three honest – or perhaps it might have been altruism – and they jointly dragged Endeavour back from the brink of ruin.

In what inevitably became known as 'the Endeavour endeavour' were sown the seeds of the Commonwealth but it was not until 689 that it became a reality. The first seven members included two colonies of Avalon, which were granted independence, and the world of Hannibal, which had collapsed almost back to barbarism after the first colonisation attempt but was offered membership and uplift for complex political and strategic reasons.

These are the Seven Great Stars of the Commonwealth banner: Avalon, New Fenris, Maine, Endeavour, Hannibal, Lyonesse and Orkney. From these seven, and in particularly from the first three, other worlds were colonised. Some are now members, some possessions and some independents, however the banner of the Seven Great Stars flies over a wide area and the starships of the Commonwealth carry it still further.

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

The Commonwealth is anything but homogenous. Officially, its diversity is a source of strength and this is true to a certain extent. However, the divisions that appeared during the voyage from Terra never really healed and each Commonwealth member has a tendency to pursue its own agenda. When the Commonwealth is headed in the same direction it is a powerful force indeed, however most of the time it is divided along gradually shifting factional lines.

The Commonwealth is rarely known by its full name, although its officials and armed forces are sometimes referred to as 'the Feds'. There are currently 52 Voting Member entities within the Commonwealth, most of which are planetary governments. Other political entities include governments controlling part of a balkanised world or multiple areas scattered over several planets, corporations and a couple of what might be termed popular movements. These non-state entities were granted membership in recognition of the political influence they wielded despite not being a territorial government in the usual sense. In addition to these 52 members there are dozens of represented territories, colonial possessions and influential organisations that are part of the Commonwealth but not directly represented in its government. These are known as Non-Voting Members.

The structure of the Commonwealth is that of a hierarchical representative democracy. Member entities are self-governing but bound by strict rules about the limits of their power and interactions with other members. The territory of a member entity can vary from multiple star systems to a small subcontinent and in some cases power is limited to the corporation's offices and assets. This can create a curious situation where the head office of a corporation with Voting Member status is hosted on a world with Non-Voting Member status.

All members of the Commonwealth are expected to provide a fraction of their GDP to common funds, which are divided among necessary sectors. Contingency funds are used for disaster relief and to assist worthy local projects; infrastructure and defence are jointly funded. The fact that everyone contributes but only the Voting Members decide where funds are to be spent causes some contention but voting status can be granted to any member and those who want more control are generally content to work towards gaining it. This is not always desirable; voting status comes with higher requirements of contribution.

Culture overall is fairly homogenous, with information and entertainment vids reaching all member worlds within a few months of release and thus ensuring a generally similar culture. There is more cultural diversity away from starports and cities with interstellar links, with local customs and dialects becoming more common in rural areas. The Commonwealth in general has a strong emphasis on self-determination that leads to a respect for democracy, however not all member entities are democracies. There are a few military dictatorships, many bureaucratic or corporate style governments and a significant number of what might be termed 'long term interim' governments. This is especially true on underdeveloped worlds where the need or capability for a proper governmental structure has not yet arisen.

MILITARY AND GOVERNMENTAL SERVICES

The Commonwealth has a unified military service, which is extended into other sectors such as disaster relief, law enforcement and diplomacy. Member entities are free to make their own arrangements but most follow the same model, allowing personnel to transfer from local to Commonwealth projects with minimal complications and expense. Likewise, equipment is either identical or at least interoperable. This means that a Commonwealth starship can transport gunboats belonging to a local power or a ground combat formation can slot in a local unit without much difficulty.

All personnel undergo common basic training in firearms safety, communications procedures, interstellar law and other necessary skills. The civil and military streams then diverge, although they remain linked. It is entirely possible, and indeed quite common, for a successful military officer to switch to civilian governance or disaster management and occasionally specialists go the other way. It is rare to find a military officer who did not come all the way up in the armed forces but occasionally a need for specialists necessitates a rapid conversion course.

The second round of training is still very general but prepares the candidate for a career in the civil or military side of the Commonwealth. Thus a member of the armed forces might spend their entire career aboard starships but will have had basic infantry training and can be expected to pick up a rifle and fight alongside ground-pounders at need. This system is expensive and in some ways inefficient but ensures any group of personnel are able to tackle any situation with at least basic competence.

Military and naval assets are structured similarly. The Commonwealth uses old-Earth designations for units and some ranks, with ground forces organised as familiar companies, battalions, brigades and so forth. However, by far the most common force designation encountered is 'detachment'. Since most armed operations are connected with starships or spacecraft, mission-tailored forces are more common than large, formally organised units. Starship forces are typically organised on an ad-hoc basis and referred to as task forces or – very occasionally – fleets.

Ground combat formations are mostly administrative. The majority of troops are either equipped as light infantry – light in the sense that their formations have no artillery or organic transport element – or specialists. The latter

are mostly transport or aerospace defence units, combat engineers or marines. The Commonwealth has relatively few artillery or armoured formations, although the grav transports used by infantry formations are equipped with air defence or fire support weaponry.

The ground forces are optimised for a security, static defence or 'grav-cav' depending on whether they have transport assigned. By far the most common operations in the history of the Commonwealth have been urban combat or counterinsurgency operations. Troops on active service are more likely to find themselves acting as security for a disaster-relief operation than fighting a heavily armed opponent. Their equipment and organisation reflects this focus on low-intensity operations and would limit effectiveness in a major ground war.

Space forces are, similarly, focussed mainly on broad-capability vessels and formations suited to peacekeeping and protection of commerce rather than warfighting. Any combat that occurs is likely to be against a planetary navy with a handful of small warships at most or, more likely, pirates and raiders. Frigates are the most common class of warship, typically with relatively low combat capabilities

and a long operational endurance. A frigate might swap from patrol to exploration work without any change of personnel or equipment; there is no separate exploration and survey organisation in the Commonwealth.

A 2,000-ton frigate is typically enough to deal with a few pirate vessels or provide an armed presence on the spaceways. For warfighting, the Commonwealth maintains a force of aviation cruisers. These are hybrid cruiser/carriers well suited to the system-control role but inefficient against a 'straight' warship of the same tonnage. Aviation cruisers can sometimes be encountered on an exploration cruise, in which case they may swap some of their combat craft for vessels better suited to the new role. Aviation cruisers may also deploy large marine contingents at times and represent the primary threat-response capability of the Commonwealth.

The pride of the fleet is a force of five Mobile Interstellar Bases. These are large (by local standards) but slow aviation cruisers carrying a mix of marine and space-combat assets. They are the largest warships in the local region, so the arrival of *Deepnight Revelation* is likely to shock and impress the Commonwealth in equal measure. Many in-system combat ships are deployed by

Commonwealth Military Ranks

RANK	COMMAND LEVEL
Recruit	Personal
Private	Personal
Private First Class	Personal
Lance-Corporal	Fire Team
Corporal	Section/Vehicle
Lance-Sergeant	Platoon/Vehicle
Sergeant	Platoon/Vehicle
Leading Sergeant	Company/Vehicle Group
Sergeant First Class	Company/Vehicle Group
Master Sergeant	Staff
Sergeant-Major	Staff
Officer Cadet	Staff/in Training
Midshipman	Platoon/Vehicle Group/Shipboard Team
Sublieutenant	Platoon/Vehicle Group/Shipboard Team
Lieutenant	Company/Vehicle Group/Shipboard Team
Lieutenant-Commander	Battalion/Vessel up to Frigate Class
Commander	Brigade/Vessel up to Cruiser Class
Captain	Reinforced Brigade/Vessel of any Class or Task Force
Commodore	Division/Large Task Force
Admiral	Corps or larger force; Naval Fleet

member states or the Commonwealth itself but other than orbital fortresses there is nothing to match the Mobile Interstellar Bases in terms of size or capability.

The military rank structure of the Commonwealth follows a Terran army tradition, more or less, for enlisted ranks and a naval pattern for officers.

The rank structure creates equivalencies – command of a frigate is considered a level of strategic capability equivalent to leading a ground combat battalion, for example. Specific experience varies considerably and a ground combat officer would not be expected to take command of a warship under most circumstances. However, all officers routinely take part in exercises incorporating elements of both naval and groundside strategy and are expected to have a grasp of the whole spectrum.

The Commonwealth believes that its forces operate in a complex 'battlespace' where events on the

ground can influence space strategy and vice versa; command officers are thus expected to be generalists to some degree, providing strategic direction whilst their subordinates deal with specifics. A cruiser's commanding officer might have cut their teeth leading groundside combat and disaster-relief teams, and knows that if the need arises they can detail an officer from their ship's company to take charge of a groundside operation. Such an officer might not have the combat prowess of a ground-pounder but does have a good understanding of what they need their force to do and how to make that fit in – and receive support from – naval assets.

The overall effect of this system is that Commonwealth forces and personnel are highly flexible and well suited to small-scale operations involving both space and deployed groundside assets. They are much less effective in the face of a major organised threat, largely because they have never faced one.



THE DUAL ALLIANCE

The Dual Alliance was founded on the world of Grand Skies, which had both human and Droyne populations when the newcomers arrived from Terra. The world was divided into multiple states – some human and some Droyne, none mixed – which had attained TL4 or so. Wars were frequent, often but not always along racial lines. At the time the Terrans arrived one of the human states had become dominant and was steadily defeating one after another of its rivals. This situation was reversed by an alliance of human and Droyne centred on the newcomers and their advanced weapons.

The alliance survived after the war, morphing into a 'dual alliance of humans and Droyne' that was more the result of a public relations campaign than pragmatic necessity. This alliance grew to encompass the whole planet and eventually the surrounding worlds, a few of which had human or Droyne populations. The newcomers were disappointed to find that the Droyne of the region did not retain any Ancients technology other than the occasional broken or incomprehensible item but the melding of ideas and mindsets benefited the Dual Alliance once the initial barriers to cooperation were broken down.

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

The Dual Alliance is a small state controlling only a handful of worlds and as such manages to retain tight control over assets outside the home system. Grand Skies itself is heavily developed, with populations on planets and moons all across the system. Most of the Alliance's economic and industrial output is on these worlds, with all assets outside the home system taking a distinctly subordinate role.

Humans and Droyne are equal partners within the Dual Alliance, at least racially. Some social groups are of lower status than others and some of those groups are purely human or Droyne, so it can seem that the alliance as a whole is racist if the wrong first encounter occurs. A significant population of Lowgees also exists within the Alliance, finding successful careers in space

industries. These, too, are legally equal to all other citizens but tend not to rise to the higher echelons of governance or commerce.

The Alliance is divided into administrative districts, most of which are a single major city or installation and its surrounding communities. District governors are appointed by the Alliance Council, whose members advise an elected president. Citizens do not directly vote officials into power but instead express their preferences for both policies and individuals, which are then used by a selection committee.

This process has produced both good and bad results, and there is widespread doubt as to whether the citizens' preferences are considered at all. In fact they are but other factors including internal influence and the advice of researchers are taken into consideration in the hope of producing the most effective and acceptable body of executives. Although everyone seems to have cause for dissatisfaction, the Alliance is overall well led most of the time and has prospered as a result.

MILITARY AND GOVERNMENTAL SERVICES

The Dual Alliance maintains a small standing army, mainly as a holdover from the wars of planetary unification. Preference is for heavy and highly survivable vehicles, including a design of super-tank that could be considered a mobile fortress. These vehicles were originally developed as mining crawlers for rockball and desert worlds, and use a common chassis to commercial vehicles. Some crawlers are equipped with aerospace defence weapons with surface combat capability as a secondary consideration; others are intended to lumber slowly up to a fortified location and smash its defences with heavy firepower. The crawlers are backed up by smaller vehicles and a force of infantry, which includes a contingent of flight-capable Droyne trained for assault operations.

There is no Alliance Navy as such. The Dual Alliance operates a large number of starships and spacecraft, and many of those in government service are armed.

Designs are unusual, with no recognisable frigate, destroyer or cruiser types. Instead the Alliance fights – on the rare occasions it has to – with armed vessels of varying size and capabilities. Many of these ships are unique, typically built for a specific mission then altered over subsequent years.

Most craft are commercial in nature and will spend their entire career in the same sector. However, ships and crews pass from one role to another as needed. A commercial transport might be outfitted as a scientific vessel or sent off on an exploitation mission and, if armed, might then find itself part of a scraped-together task force headed out to deal with a problem on the frontiers.

A similar situation exists with the Alliance's officials. No distinction is made between ambassadors, governors of local assets and merchants; an Alliance official represents the whole spectrum of activities it might engage in. This can cause confusion in states where roles and areas of influence are more rigidly defined but allows the Alliance to extend its web of official contacts beyond what it would normally be able to cover. Some of these generalist representatives operate from starships rather than a diplomatic residence and may undertake long mercantile/diplomatic cruises across the entire FSN region.



THE GRAND REPUBLIC

The Grand Republic, for all its title, is the least democratic of the region's major powers. It was founded on the world of Gimli, from which the surrounding sector gets its name, and rapidly came to dominate nearby star systems. Ambitious initial expansion resulted in an early wearing-out of the initial starships, long before replacements could be built, and for many years the cluster of secondary colonies around Gimli went their own way. Those on uninhabitable worlds died out but the reinvention of the jump drive allowed ships out of Gimli to recontact those that remained. None were in a position to resist the take-it-or-leave-it deal offered by what was then the Republic of Gimli.

This 'republic' was democratic only in name. Already it was developing into a pseudo-dictatorship run by a hereditary clique of powerful individuals. The leaders of prospective worlds were offered a place as junior members of this clique; those who accepted joined the newly-declared Grand Republic and those that did not were deposed. Expansion has proceeded in the same manner ever since.

The early years of the Grand Republic were characterised by competing demands for the few available starships, resulting in a less organised expansion than the clique would have wanted. A series of brutal internal 'readjustments' around year 580 threw the Grand Republic into chaos but established its current form as a highly regulated, centralised state. Expansion took place in a more orderly manner after this, with promising worlds selected as hubs and granted generous investment with the expectation they would serve as bases for the subjugation of the surrounding region or carry out conquests with their own resources.

This process was slow but methodical, with the occasional long-range project carried out where the benefits seemed worthwhile. As a result the heartland of the Grand Republic is a patchwork of hubs and their areas of influence with a few outlying hubs or strategic assets. Information exchange and internal commerce are quick and efficient within the heartland and a rather... assertive... naval presence is maintained along the frontiers.

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

The Grand Republic is divided into Republican Provinces, each of which is a major world and its possessions, and Non-Republican Provinces which are areas of interest lacking a major world. Each major world is a provincial capital with theoretically autonomous control over its territory. In practice, policy is dictated from the central government on Gimli. Whilst provincial governors have some leeway regarding how they implement policy they are expected to obtain the results desired in the capital and face harsh consequences if they do not.

Some of the trappings of democracy are maintained, with citizens voting on issues they wish their representatives to raise. However, whilst public opinion is kept in mind when making decisions, the Grand Republic is essentially a series of nested autocracies. At the head of the whole Grand Republic is a president elected by the Grand Senate without direct input from the citizenry. The president is theoretically 'first among equals' among the members of the Grand Senate but has additional powers and can rule by decree in an emergency – which happens predictably often. The senators are the most powerful of the Grand Republic's industrialists, financiers and landowners whose positions are (again, theoretically) elected. In practice, a Senate seat only changes hands when a powerful figure goes into eclipse.

Provincial governors are appointed by the Grand Senate and then appoint their own officials. Governorships are sometimes more or less hereditary but there is always a considerable amount of bargaining behind the scenes and a governor may be suddenly dismissed when the political winds change at the capital. Thus a president who is secure in his power is more or less an interstellar dictator whilst someone who must rely on bargaining with the senators, and perhaps even the provincial governors, is essentially powerless.

Society is generally contented, although at any given time there will always be dissent, and even unrest, somewhere in a large interstellar state. The lack of political power

wielded by most citizens is offset in various ways. Social mobility is actually good in the Grand Republic and those who wish to have more power and privilege are able to work towards it in a meaningful fashion. Those not inclined to seek greater self-determination are distracted by a high standard of living and steady diet of what amounts to propaganda built into everything from entertainment vids to advertising. The majority of citizens, at least on the high-technology, high-population hub worlds, are safe, prosperous and contented.

MILITARY AND GOVERNMENTAL SERVICES

The Grand Republic is not exactly a militarised culture but service of one sort or another is built into the fabric of society. Generous education packages and preferential employment policies encourage service either in the military or one of the civilian services, whilst enrolling in a militia unit brings with it a tax break. Governmental and military services are arranged in three tiers: republican, provincial and local, each with differing areas of interest but similar career structures and high mobility between them. The whole system is highly uniform and well regulated, with most problems dealt with at the lowest level possible. Laws are the same throughout the Grand Republic, as are most social customs.

There are no world governments as such in the Grand Republic, although each world has its own local administrative apparatus. This is larger and more complex for more important worlds but no local government controls anything beyond the close orbital space of its homeworld; each inhabited body in a system has its own local administration, which in turn is answerable to the provincial governor. A provincial governor controls all systems within his province, which typically will consist of a hub world and several minor possessions in the same or different star systems. Provincial governors are in turn answerable to the president of the Grand Republic and ungoverned provinces are the responsibility of assigned officials at the republican level.

The military is organised along similar lines. With the exceptions of the planetary militias, armed forces are raised on a republic-wide basis and assigned to provincial or local commanders as needed. Militia can also be co-opted by the provincial governor at need, although this is seen as undesirable since it takes personnel away from their day jobs. The usual system

is that worlds are defended by their planetary militia with provincial and republican level forces available at need, while offensive operations are undertaken at the republican level.

On a backwater world the planetary militia may be nothing more than a few armed colonists but hub worlds are required to maintain a solid defensive capability. The formations of a planetary militia include some full-time units serving in key roles, whilst most infantry formations are staffed by a cadre of professionals to be joined by part-time members at need. Most such units are of low quality compared to regular formations but contain a scattering of veterans who provide leadership and a good example. The militia operates groundside aerospace defences and craft capable of operating in atmosphere but is not responsible for operations above low orbit.

Ground forces are organised as legions, a term coined long ago for an all-arms force. The standard legion is nominally 10 company-sized units, with a company comprising 100 personnel or an equivalent force of vehicles, artillery and so forth. A legion has its own artillery and aerospace defence contingent plus a light armoured force, with these three companies, supported by six infantry companies which usually have their own vehicles, plus a workshop, maintenance and administrative contingent assigned to the headquarters company. Vehicles are typically wheeled for militia and some provincial forces, with grav-mobile assets held at the republican level.

This arrangement has proven effective in small-scale conflicts and even during the revolts of 1034–1051 the republican legions were sufficient. Like other powers of the region, the Grand Republic has never fought a major ground war against a well-organised enemy. Its wars have tended to be low-intensity affairs or colonial campaigns against lower-tech opponents and as a result the republican legions are better suited to policing an empire than fighting one.

Space forces are organised similarly. Aerospace defence of planets generally falls within the jurisdiction of the planetary militia, although important worlds have installations manned by provincial troops. Anything beyond the atmosphere is a matter for the provincial commander, including non-jump-capable system defence craft and interstellar warships. Typically a provincial commander will have at their disposal a force of gunboats for the hub system, plus patrol cutters and similar small combatants. It is rare to find anything larger than a corvette under provincial command.

The Grand Republic favours corvettes for patrol work, with flotillas of destroyers as fast-response forces. It is very much a 'cruiser navy' however, with several classes in service. The largest are mostly battlecruisers intended for the direct-combat role or flag cruisers that serve as flagships for fleets and task forces. The 'capital cruisers' of the Presidential Squadron are capable of outfighting any other class of ship in service with the Grand Republic and crewed by the most politically reliable personnel. Lesser – but still impressive by local standards – cruisers operate along the borders of the

Grand Republic and in systems outside it, generally with a heavy-handed and arrogant attitude backed up by the largest warfighting fleet for many parsecs.

Enlisted ranks follow a typical Old Earth Union model with some minor variations but the army uses a system of officer ranks tailored to its legion system. The word 'lieutenant' refers to an officer in a supporting role such as the executive officer of a legion. Companies are commanded by captains, legions by colonels and the rank of major is a non-command position. The navy is similarly organised.

Grand Republic Military Ranks

ARMY RANK	NAVY RANK	NOTES
Ensign	Ensign	An ensign is a very junior officer fulfilling a specialist function or leading small teams as needed aboard a ship or in a ground formation.
Sublieutenant	Sublieutenant	A sublieutenant will typically lead a platoon or a team aboard a starship.
Lieutenant-Captain	Lieutenant	A lieutenant-captain assists the captain of an infantry company either as second in command or in a technical capacity. A naval lieutenant similarly leads a team aboard a starship or fulfils an important function such as directing a battery of weapons.
Captain	Command Lieutenant	The commander of a company-sized fighting force holds the rank of captain. The naval equivalent is Command Lieutenant, the minimum 'command rank'. A Command Lieutenant will normally be the commanding officer of a small vessel, such as a corvette, or leader of a division aboard a mid-sized warship.
Major	Major	The rank of major in both army and navy denotes a senior non-command or staff officer such as surgeon or intelligence officer or aide to a flag officer.
Lieutenant-Colonel	Lieutenant-Commander	A lieutenant-colonel is the executive officer of a legion-sized force or fulfils an equivalently sensitive task. Similarly, the naval rank of lieutenant-commander is not a command rank but held by the executive officer of a warship or the commanding officer of one of its divisions.
Colonel	Commander	A colonel commands a legion or equivalent force. A commander commands a warship up to destroyer size or may head a division aboard a cruiser.
Brigadier	Captain	The commanding officer of a force containing multiple legions formally organised as a brigade is termed a brigadier and considered equivalent to commanding officer of a major warship such as a cruiser.
General	Commodore	A general commands a force comprising multiple brigades; a commodore commands a multi-warship force.
Marshal	Marshal	The Marshals of the Republic command all large forces or supervise all forces within a region.

It is the nature of military service in the Grand Republic that most troubles are handled by small forces and minor ships, often with little prospect of support. Legion or even company commanders often have to make far-reaching policy decisions and some decision-making policies are referred to as 'legion-level', 'cruiser-level' and so forth in acknowledgement that military command is also a license to make political decisions.

Republican Marshal is the highest military rank attainable but even more so than other command ranks the post is far more than purely strategic. A marshal

is the direct representative of the president and can overrule a provincial governor or the commander of a naval force. There are no admirals in the Republic because it would never field a fleet large enough to justify one without a marshal in command. Marshals are sometimes appointed from outside the military and may have a different skill set such as disaster management or political investigation but all have a solid grasp of political necessity; a marshal leading a fleet or army will direct the campaign but may leave details of strategic planning to subordinates.



THE EMPIRE OF ENVAIS

The Empire of Envais followed a similar path to other powers in the region, taking over its homeworld and expanding to nearby systems before its transport vessel finally broke down. It was not until 725 that the first starship left the Envais system. The intervening years were a cycle of civil wars and disasters which was not broken until the violent reunification that resulted in the Empire of Envais. Declared in 959, the Empire is aggressive and territorial, not satisfied with regaining control over its former colonies.

Envais is essentially a single-world interstellar power with numerous offworld possessions. Control over these is not always tight and the colonies have a long history of independence wars going all the way back to the first recontact missions. The Empire is no threat to the major powers but is significant locally and has plans to expand further. Its current emperor is greedy, even by the standards of her predecessor, and prone to making decisions based on wishful thinking and a lust for more of everything rather than good planning. The Empire is overstretched already but the answer is of course to grab for more. One more campaign or even a good raid somewhere will solve all the problems...

The Empire has a reasonable industrial base but supplements its internal production with raiding and extortion. The usual pattern is to hit a target hard and cause a lot of destruction without worrying too much about the profits, then come back later and demand tribute not to do it again. Sometimes worlds develop the ability to fight back, in which case they are taught a lesson or left alone depending on the level of resistance anticipated. Raiding is not a sustainable industry but could yield good results for a long time if raids were limited and the victims allowed to recover. However, the desire for plunder or a need to fill a short-term hole in the budget can lead to targets being made unproductive. As a result, the raiders have to travel further out next time, which diminishes returns, creating a new deficit that can only be remedied by more raiding.

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

The Empire's political structure is a rather ramshackle collection of powerful individuals who have taken suitably impressive titles. There are dukes and earls, a tzar and several princes – some of whom have sufficient assets to possibly be worthy of the title. Comical as this posturing might seem to some outsiders, the internal manoeuvrings of the imperial court are deadly serious and the Empire as a whole has enough clout to make its displeasure very unpleasant indeed. An independent world that fails to show proper respect to a prince of Envais may become a target for punitive raids and indeed such an incident may well be provoked in order to create a pretext if an inconvenient treaty is reducing raiding revenue.

The general populace are ruled by the nobility, swearing loyalty to a noble house upon coming of age. The lives of commoners are of scant consideration to the rulers unless they have particularly important skills and those in privileged positions are jealous of their power to the point where the most cruel are not the uncaring nobles but mid-level commoners terrified of losing their position. Social mobility is a matter of currying favour or acquiring leverage and of keeping others down as they try to do the same.

As might be expected, the political arena extends into daily life and assassination attempts are commonplace, sometimes throwing a region into chaos whether successful or not. Secondary troubles are not rare, caused by nervous security details or misread clues on the part of an intelligence agency. Since direct pre-emptive action is often the only sure way to protect a principal, bodyguards tend to be trigger-happy and prone to shoot first and not bother with questions at all.



MILITARY AND GOVERNMENTAL SERVICES

The Empire is small enough that most matters can be handled directly or by an agent on the spot; although the emperor maintains a bureaucratic apparatus, as do all the great nobility, there is no 'imperial government' as such. Likewise law enforcement and all forms of regulation are patchy, corrupt and prone to interference from those in a position of power. Far more effort is expended upon avoiding the consequences of failure than on attempts to succeed and blame deflection is an art form.

Similarly there is no Imperial Army or Navy. Each noble or notable has their own body of troops and possibly some starships, with the emperor having more than anyone else. Larger forces can be formed by requesting, bargaining for, or coercing support out of, nobles typically creating a poorly organised and disobedient force useful mainly as a blunt instrument. This is generally sufficient to overwhelm any local power but would not stand a chance against an organised force.

The forces of the nobles are optimised for skirmishing in urban environments or launching raids from starships against lower-tech communities. Personal and light support weapons are available in large numbers along with light vehicles converted to weapons carriers. True military hardware is far less common, although some nobles will buy weapons and vehicles from offworld suppliers or loot it from raid victims. Forces tend to be equipped with a hodgepodge of gear, often proudly displaying a mid-tech tank they captured somewhere or similar trophy-turned-asset.

The troops of the Empire are good enough in a skirmish or urban brawl and some have become very slick at planetary raiding from starships. Their small-unit tactics are basic but well-practiced. On the other hand, these are raiders used to hitting targets by surprise and encountering confused resistance from outgunned mid-tech forces. How well they would deal with determined resistance or recover from a major setback is a question that has yet to be answered.

THE BIOLOGICALS

The first reported contact with the so-called 'bioships' occurred in the Brittia sector around 200 years ago. Since then there have been reports of sightings in other sectors, generally to spinward or coreward of the main inhabited region. The term bioships was applied due to the appearance of the vessels, which seemed to be organic in nature. This impression was correct. The bioships are indeed of organic origin and operated by a species that uses biological technology in place of the usual metals and electronics. In fact, it might be more correct to say they are part of this species.

The Biologicals, to give them as good a name as any, have no name for their own species or culture. Their seat of consciousness rests in an organic brain that can direct how its body grows. It was not always thus; in all probability the Biologicals originally had a single form and learned how to reshape themselves over millennia of experimentation. The brain needs support in the form of an oxygen-bearing fluid, not unlike blood, and sustenance from some kind of food. It is surrounded by organs that provide both by processing what comes in through the few openings in its case, which is a tough, fibrous shell about the size of a large melon. All sentient Biologicals have a brain and organ case of this sort, although what is outside can differ enormously.

A Biological's braincase acts in the same manner as an electronic 'black boxed' component; it has standard fittings and interfaces that allow it to be used with attachments or be added to a system. The concept is well understood in the technological sense and is not very different here. So long as the brain is not damaged, a Biological can survive the total annihilation of its external body. It can be kept alive by providing oxygen and some form of food – sugary liquid will work – into the right orifices. The Biologicals themselves have created creatures for this specific purpose and can use one to transport a braincase to its new body. Alternatively, the braincase can be implanted into a 'body vine' and grow itself a new body.

BIOLOGICAL BODIES

Whatever the Biologicals' original form may have been, today they grow bodies to suit their needs. Most are basic humanoid forms used for day-to-day tasks

but some Biologicals grow specialist bodies suited to anything from earth moving to interstellar travel. The key to this is what might be called a body vine, a plant structure with flower-like nodules that enfold whatever is placed within them. The vine connects to the orifices on the braincase and supplies food and oxygen in the form of rich fluids and the braincase is able to direct how the plant is to grow. It will take months to grow a humanoid body and years for a larger one; starships might take a century or more to create.

Some braincases do not grow themselves a body but remain connected to the vine for decades or more to produce specialist items. Most of these are entirely mundane and duplicate human tools or small equipment items but a Biological can grow anything it can conceive of. This includes power plants, biological lasers and other biotech equipment as discussed starting on page 61 of the *Vehicle Handbook*. A vine may also grow several host bodies ready to have braincases attached.

A vine might also be part of a forest or area of vegetation it has directed to grow but does not have direct control over. This can create a situation where a forest is literally watching the Travellers as they enter, passing information to the braincase containing the directing intellect. Biologicals cannot control ordinary plant life but could create defences or traps within a densely foliated area. Typically if an active area of Biological vegetation is encountered there will be a braincase nearby but is likely to be buried or in the roots of an innocuous-looking tree. A braincase can draw sustenance from an ordinary tree or other plant and direct its own growth to resemble the local flora. However, there will always be subtle differences an alert frontiersman can spot.

Biologicals' bodies are grown from plant matter and are far more resilient than normal fleshy tissues. As a result crushing, impaling and projectile weapons do reduced damage – treat 1D as D3 and D3 as one point. Energy and cutting weapons do full damage.

TARGETING A BRAINCASE

If a braincase is attacked directly it has Hits 12 and Protection +12 points from a tough, fibrous outer casing. One can be targeted directly if it is outside a host body but hitting one within a host is more difficult. If the Travellers know roughly where to aim – perhaps after an autopsy on a victim of an earlier encounter – then the braincase can be targeted with DM-4 on an attack roll. It is treated as having one extra point of Protection for every four points of STR, DEX and END (or Hits, if they are used instead) the host has.

Ambulator

There is no standard ambulator body as such; sizes vary considerably and some have a different number of limbs. The commonest configuration is a quadruped or, occasionally, hexapod, with a tubby central body and very small head on a long neck. Breathing is normally by way of lungs located in the front of the torso, with openings for inhalation and exhalation on the sides. This arrangement can be replaced by gills in bodies intended to operate in water, in which case the legs will be flippers instead. A pair of arms emerges from the 'shoulders' of the body and may end in claws or hands with anything from two to eight fingers, usually but not always with one or more thumbs.

The head houses sensory organs and is the intake path for food but otherwise expendable. It contains the brain of the ambulator body, which can function on an animal level at need. Without its animal brain a body with no braincase inserted will die. Decapitating an ambulator body with a braincase aboard will inconvenience it considerably but it will not die until starvation sets in.

Digestive organs are located in the rear of the torso, with the braincase nestling between the respiratory and digestive apparatus. It is common but by no means universal for ambulators to have a heart for each set of organs. Inserting the braincase is a messy business but once inside it is well protected. Indeed, an ambulator can function with its torso cut open to reveal the braincase, one heart out of action and its head blown clean off. It can be kept alive in this condition and will eventually regrow missing body parts, although it is quicker and more convenient to move the braincase to another body and use the current one as fertiliser or food.

An ambulator with a sentient braincase is considered to be a sophont for most purposes and can learn skills or interact with others. Ambulators without a

Typical Ambulator

STR 2D+2 DEX 2D END 2D+2 INT 2D

EDU and SOC are meaningless in the context of the Biologicals.

An ambulator can be made to cease functioning meaningfully by reducing its STR, DEX and END to 0. However, if there is a braincase aboard it will still try to crawl away and begin repairing itself or may send plant-like shoots down into the ground and attempt to grow a body vine. Destroying the braincase is usually a separate task unless something extremely destructive, like a hyperbaric charge or plasma gun, is used.

braincase have only minimal nervous systems and will operate on an instinctive level or obey commands from any nearby Biological.



Heavy Lifter

The heavy lifter is a large host body, the size of a small truck. Most have six legs and four arms but are generally configured much like an ambulator. Two arms are optimised for heavy work such as tearing up trees or pushing through the walls of a light building, whilst an upper pair of arms is similar to that of the ambulator. A heavy lifter can be used as a weapons carrier, typically mounting a support weapon upon a hump on its back. It will normally have Hits 150 and Protection +8 but this can vary.

WEAPONS OF THE BIOLOGICALS

The Biologicals use weapons quite different to those of humans in this region or Charted Space, although the principles can be similar.

Bone Spitter: The bone spitter typically resembles a short-barrelled firearm if handheld and may be permanently mounted on a body by being grown in place of a hand. The 'bones' launched by this weapon are in fact spines of a bone-like material. They travel at very high velocity and can do a lot of damage despite their small dimensions. A typical bone spitter launches small bursts of spines out to a maximum range of 25 metres, doing 2D damage, and can do so 12 times before needing to produce or obtain more ammunition. Growing more spines takes 1D hours. A larger spitter fires a shotgun-like blast of spines and does 6D damage with the same range and ammunition considerations. Some heavy lifters are fitted with a 'bone cannon', which fires clouds of heavier spines out to 100 metres doing 6D damage. Its ammunition supply is effectively unlimited.

Spines may be toxic to the target if the Biologicals have had the chance to tailor their ammunition. This will occur as soon as they have had a chance to study an enemy's biology. Toxic darts will intoxicate anyone who takes damage from them unless an Average (8+) END check is made. The victim will then take an additional 1D damage every 1D hours, repeating the check until it is passed or successful treatment is applied.

Combat Spike: A combat spike is nothing more than a bone spine, pointed at the tip and sometimes sharp on one side to create a cutting blade. Spikes vary in length but are generally proportional to the size of the host body. An ambulator's spike typically does 2D damage; one fitted to a heavy lifter is a 1DD weapon. The spike may be hand-held or might replace the hand on that arm; the latter is uncommon on ambulators but heavy lifters intended for the assault role may have such a weapon.

Thumper: The thumper is a capability that can be grown into large bodies like a heavy lifter. The 'thump' is a rapid expulsion of air that produces a low-frequency sound and pressure wave up to 15 metres in all directions. The effect is to cause 4D damage to anyone not inside a sealed vehicle and significant damage to light structures. The pressure wave will render anyone who fails an Average (8+) END check unconscious for 2D rounds. The thumper effect can only be used once every 2D minutes and requires the host body to take a huge breath immediately beforehand.

Venom Sprayer: Large bodies, such as a heavy lifter, can be fitted with a device that resembles an elephant's trunk in some ways, allowing it to spray a caustic acid up to 50 metres. The acid will cause 3D damage to everything it touches on the first round of contact, then 2D the next round, then 1D in the third round. A target that is hit multiple times counts only the highest level of damage at any one time. Anyone receiving skin contact with the acid can also be intoxicated in the same manner as the toxin on bone spitter darts.

SOCIETY

The social organisation of the Biologicals is more or less incomprehensible to humans. They appear to be a highly cooperative society and often act in close concert but they display none of the usual trappings of an organised society. Indeed, there is no indication they communicate with one another at all, at least not in the usual sense, which might be taken to imply they are psionic. In fact, they are not.

The Biologicals operate in a wholly different way to humans and are not intelligent in the same way. All have the same instinctive responses to the same stimuli and thus know what another would do in the same circumstances, so cooperation is a natural process without conscious thought or a need for an exchange of information. Biologicals are very predictable as a result, which should become apparent once the Travellers have studied them for a while.

They can communicate by a variety of means. Complex information can be transmitted by pheromones, although this is a slow process unless they are in physical contact. Observed movements or vibrations, in the form of sound or tremors, are normally used for simple information transfers. The Travellers may see nothing more than a few shaking leaves and hear a rustle but this can be enough to transfer the equivalent of a few sentences.

Communication over long distances is performed by physical presence if there is not a continuous chain of Biologicals or plants they can control; an ambulatory

Biological will be sent to a location and pass on the information it carries. It is common for Biologicals to touch and exchange pheromones with all other Biologicals they encounter, passing all information known to each party back and forth. Some hosts can produce a pheromone cloud that will fulfil the same function without contact.

Communities in contact with one another will therefore know everything the other knows, whilst those isolated may lack recent knowledge. Within a community of Biologicals, each will know what all the others do and no more. They have little concept of individual identity but an isolated single Biological may act differently to others and communities can gain varying characteristics depending on their experiences. This is the closest the Biologicals come to individuality.

THE AGENDA

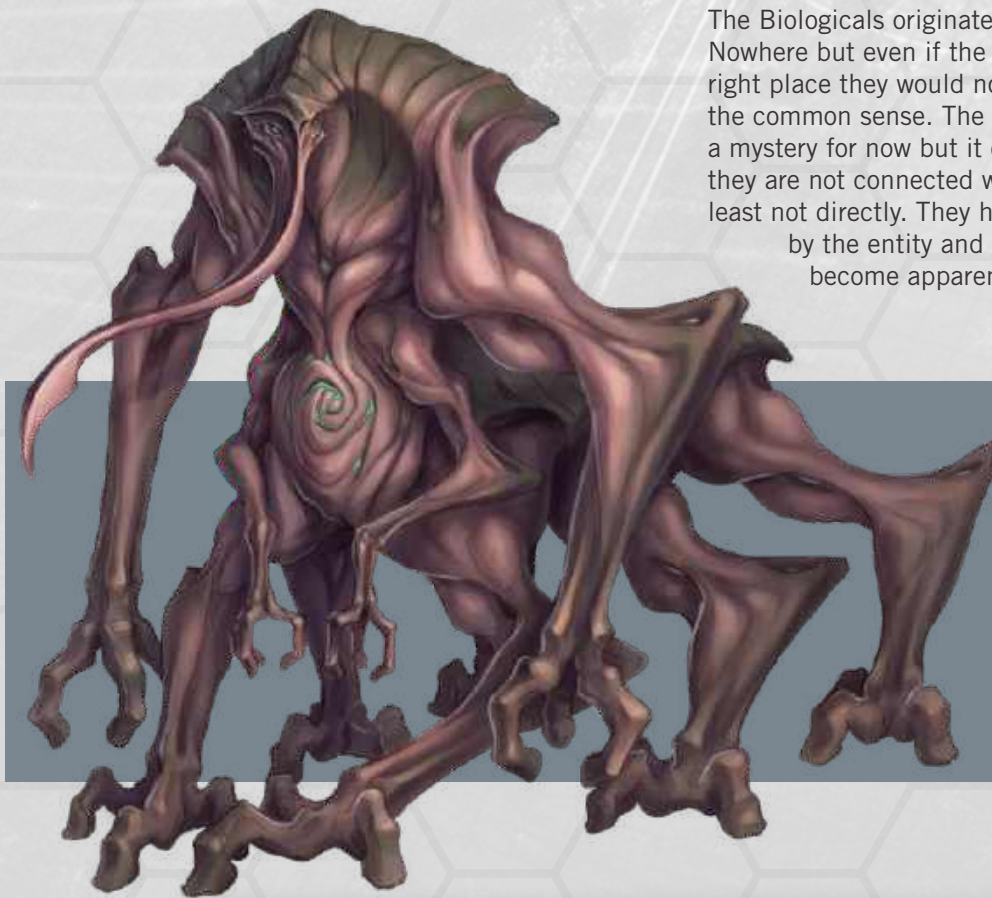
Despite their strangeness, the Biologicals are sentient and self-aware – just in a very different way to humans. Their agenda is simple – they want to spread their species and ensure its survival. They have no concept of politics, deceit or misdirection – although they understand that sometimes poor data leads to false conclusions – and would be quite plain about their intentions if communication could ever be established.

The Biologicals understand – far better than humans – the interplay of an ecosystem and the fact that some battles cannot be won. This could be paraphrased as ‘we cannot displace the local species from this ecological niche’ or ‘we cannot thrive in this location’ and is the only possible basis for negotiation. The Biologicals are not interested in personal gain or individual success; they are part of a community and work to make it succeed. If they can be shown that the community would not benefit from an endeavour, they will not undertake it.

It might therefore be possible to come to an understanding with a community of Biologicals but it would be one based on capabilities rather than consequences. They have no concept of mercy or kinship among species; the moment it becomes possible to displace another form of life from a desirable area they will do so without remorse or hesitation and without any regard to threatened consequences. Bargaining is impossible, since an item that is out of reach is out of reach and one that can be taken *will* be taken. The idea of ‘I will give this to you in return for that’ is incomprehensible to the Biologicals – they either grow over something and thereafter possess it, or they do not. The only language they understand is ‘we can make the cost too high for this action to benefit you’.

ORIGINS

The Biologicals originated outside the Far Side of Nowhere but even if the Travellers knew to look in the right place they would not find evidence of evolution in the common sense. The Biologicals’ origins will remain a mystery for now but it can be said for certain that they are not connected with the Deepnight Entity; at least not directly. They have a resistance to infection by the entity and this is not coincidental, as will become apparent in *Voidshore*.



Heavy Lifter

TRADEPORT

Tradeport was founded over a century ago by a separatist group hailing mostly from the Commonwealth. Their initial aim was rather grand; they would re-enact the great exodus from Terra and set up a new home somewhere free from the interference of their political rivals. The project was a partial success and the expedition found a new home far away and began constructing an orbital city. However, materials were in short supply and the grand project lurched to an uncomfortable stop. The half-built orbital city became a monument to over-reaching ambition as the population moved planetside and constructed a rather more basic settlement.

Tradeport was not an unqualified failure. Parts of the orbital city were liveable and food was available in abundance from the garden world below. Within a few decades Tradeport had achieved its current form, if achieved is the right word. It became a freeport where ships from any power could dock and conduct business, providing they kept the peace. The one thing the constructors did not lack was firepower; the orbital city might be a half-finished mess but it is festooned with weaponry.

It is the economic and industrial centre for the surrounding region, with a small shipyard and busy orbital dock. Its operators do not want to be a political power but in many ways Tradeport is an interstellar state of sorts. It has no holdings outside the orbital city and the planetside port, and does not even govern its host world, but it must protect its interests in the surrounding star systems, which requires acting like a state when necessary.

The Tradeport star system had a different name once but today it is simply known as Tradeport or, colloquially, Teepie. Ships operating out of the port can be encountered many parsecs away and most populations in the surrounding area have at least occasional contact with the 'Teepie Traders'. Three star systems are of particular importance, partly due to proximity and partly as providers of necessary resources.

HARDSLOG

The Hardslog system lies two parsecs from Tradeport. It is important as a source of minerals and metals, which are mined by semi-permanently deployed vessels whose

crews rotate back to base every few weeks. Replacement Day is eagerly anticipated by crewmembers; a late supply ship can cause friction among ill-tempered workers.

The system's bodies are named in a tongue-in-cheek but usefully descriptive fashion. There are no habitable worlds, nor anything that resembles one, but there are four planetoid belts. The innermost is very close to the star and may not be stable; it is clumpy, suggesting a broken-up planet. Heat and radiation from the star make the Fire Belt very dangerous to work in and few ships venture there. The main belt is divided into two clearly defined zones, both of which are reasonably productive, whilst the outer belt is mostly made up of ice asteroids. Most of the mining that goes on in the system is in the main belt.

The rest of the system is populated with rockballs, gas giants and terrestrials with unbreathable atmospheres at best. The Hardslog system is not populated and not claimed by any power but is considered an area of interest for the owners of Tradeport. Few pirates would consider attacking the ore ships, since this guarantees at the very least a closing of the port to that pirate band and possibly retaliation of a more violent sort.

HARDSLOG PRIMARY (G6 Star)

Hardslog Fire Belt	(X000000-0)
Hardslog Essgie Inner	Small Gas Giant
Unfriendly	(X510000-0)
Hardslog Belt Inner	(X000000-0)
Hardslog Belt Outer	(X000000-0)
Hardslog Elgie Inner	(Large Gas Giant)
Very Unfriendly	(X6A0000-0)
Hardslog Essgie Outer	(Small Gas Giant)
Speck	(X100000-0)
Just Plain Nasty	(X9B0000-0)
Hardslog Ice Belt	(X000000-0)
Hardslog Elgie Outer	(Large Gas Giant)
Outtahere	(Small Gas Giant)

HARDSLOG SECONDARY (M5 Star)

Hardslog Essgie Distant	(Small Gas Giant)
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GRIT

The Grit system is named for its mainworld, an uninviting desert planet with an unbreathable atmosphere. Its name also describes the broad planetoid field occupying the inner two orbits. The



belt is mostly composed of very small planetoids of little value and has never been worth mining. Even the system's gas giant is unimpressive and rather small.

Grit itself is, as the name suggests, a vast expanse of gritty yellow-brown dirt. The world has little to recommend it, other than an abundance of mineral resources. These are exploited by small mining settlements, which make no claim to be a world government, and a single mobile installation imaginatively named Crawler. Machines of this sort are used on various worlds but their expense and the difficulty in transporting them makes these vehicles uncommon outside the territory of the major powers.

Crawler is a prototype that never got past the demonstration stage and was sold off cheaply. Dismantled, shipped to Tradeport and then Grit, it has been in service for decades and modified to use locally available components. The crawler is big enough to be considered a small town. Its upper deck has a landing area capable of taking a small starship and it is armed with starship-grade weapons although these may not be functional.

Crawler moves slowly across the barren landscape of Grit, scooping up loose surface material and sifting it for useful materials. When a concentrated deposit is detected the crawler will stop and begin strip-mining operations for a few months, leaving behind a trail of pits in the desert surface. If there was an ecology on Grit to damage, Crawler would be a serious threat to it but rearranging a barren desert is of no consequence.

GRIT PRIMARY (M5 Star)

Grit Belt Inner (X000000-0)
Grit Belt Outer (X000000-0)
Grit (D7A514-8).
Pipsqueak (Small Gas Giant)

WILDWOOD

The Wildwood system lies a parsec from Tradeport. It centres on an unremarkable M3 (red) main sequence star and contains two small gas giants and two uninviting terrestrials, in addition to the mainworld and a sparse, distant planetoid belt. The system's bodies were named in flippant style to reflect their characteristics.

Corrosion Bath is, as its name suggests, a corrosive-atmosphere water world and has no permanent population. From time-to-time temporary facilities have been set up planetside to extract chemicals from the atmosphere and oceans but it has proven much simpler to do this from a vessel in orbit than to try to build on the few scraps of land available above sea level.

Wildwood is rather more welcoming. It is a temperate world with extensive forestation. From orbit, Wildwood is a sea of green with mountains poking up from the forest canopy. Open land tends to be in colder regions or deserts, creating a contrast between useable areas requiring forest clearance and clear regions that are inhospitable. It has several small city-states, at TL8. They are widely separated and have little need for cooperation or conflict. Each is surrounded by a cleared zone, allowing agriculture to be undertaken but keeping the exuberant local ecosystem from taking over the fields is a constant battle. Beyond cleared zones the forests are largely unexplored, although they do not seem to be home to dangerous wildlife.

The city-states of Wildwood are steady clients for goods manufactured at Tradeport. Although they are not wealthy enough to place big orders, markets like this provide steady income and are protected wherever possible from raiders and prospective conquerors, as well as economic rivals. Wherever possible Tradeport prefers to deter and discourage rather than retaliate and when retaliation does come it is usually economic in nature – although that can mean paying pirate bands to prey on the transgressors.

WILDWOOD PRIMARY (M3 Star)

Wildwood Essgie Inner (Small Gas Giant)
Wildwood Essgie Outer (Small Gas Giant)
Wildwood (C686675-8)
Wildrock (X400000-0)
Corrosion Bath (X8BA000-0)
Wildwood Belt (X000000-0)

TRADEPORT

The Tradeport system centres on a K7 (orange) main sequence star that is named Giselle. Planetary names appear to be derivatives of traditional French female names, although linguistic drift means another origin is possible. Beyjou is still called by that name among its inhabitants and usually also the people of Tradeport, although outsiders tend to refer to the installation, the plane, and the star system as Tradeport.

Lizaette and Fleyrine both have small outposts maintained from Tradeport. Neither is of any great importance but plans to expand one or both are occasionally dusted off and subjected to the usual feasibility study before being shelved again. Similarly, there are mining outposts scattered among the moons of the three gas giants, with a fair amount of in-system traffic plying between them. Ceyrine is distant and not very useful, with no moons to speak of. It does have a sparse and wide ring system but mining operations have never been considered viable.

GISELLE (K7 Star)

Hadria	(Large Gas Giant)
Matilte	(Small Gas Giant)
Tradeport/Beyjou	(B755874-8)
Oradette	(Small Gas Giant)
Lizaette	(D611416-8)
Fleyrine	(EAA2316-8)
Ceyine	(Low-Density Gas Giant)

Tradeport Orbital

Tradeport Orbital, known locally as just 'Orbital', is a sad reminder of what happens when ambition exceeds resources. The founders arrived prepared to build in space, with a dockyard vessel and mining ships but lacked experience of such a project. They tried to do too much at once, hoping to create a large orbital installation that was both port and city. As planned, Orbital would have been an industrial power in its own right, sitting at the heart of a web of trade lanes.

In the event, most of the framework was constructed before the project ran into difficulties. Short of resources and finding they did not properly understand the techniques in use, the founders clung to their original plan too long and had to take emergency measures to prevent the collapse of the main structure. Parts of it remain unsafe and most of the rest is just a skeleton, the original elegant framework marred by rushed shoring-up work and a few sections entirely missing. These were cut away to prevent stress on other incomplete sections and clumsily welded into place elsewhere.

The main docking area was eventually completed and today can handle several ships of up to 2,000 tons at once whilst the freight dock can take a single ship of up to 20,000 tons. Once inside the orbital installation it is well appointed and impressive by local standards, although the Travellers will spot tell-tale signs that appearances have been emphasised over proper maintenance. This is due to a downward spiral that will eventually make the port inoperable but it has many years of service left and the situation could be turned around.

Within the framework there are several habitation areas that collectively make up a city housing around three million people and an industrial complex capable of turning out TL12 goods in large quantities. The dockyard, such as it is, can build starships of up to 600 tons with its present facilities but could handle much larger vessels if the machinery were available.

The founders always knew they might be a target and provided for defence. There are several small military complexes dotted around the main structure. Some of

these house missile or particle accelerator bays; others contain hangars and launch facilities for gunboats and fighters. Individual turrets have been fitted all over the main structure, wherever there was an anchor point and a power feed. Tradeport Orbital is, by local standards at least, a fortress that can deploy sufficient craft to chase raiders out of the system and has a large flotilla of armed starships that can project at least a little power into other star systems.

Moored to the rear of the station is a rather sad collection of worn-out starships and vessels that have no current use. These include a couple of big freighters that brought most of the founder population to Beyjou and were later converted back to a commercial role. There is little use for such big ships in a region where there are no bulk freight ports and no markets that justify the deployment of such vessels. A plan to convert these ships into heavy merchant cruisers for long cruises in the region is on hold for lack of resources. The vessel that would carry out this conversion, a 20,000 ton 'floating dock', is also mothballed for the same reason.

Tradeport Down

Tradeport Down is a custom-built city initially flung together to house the population associated with the Founders. Over the past century or so it has been expanded and rebuilt in a more organised manner and today might be considered the jewel of local civilisation. That is not saying much, however. The city uses a mix of locally available TL8 materials and techniques, and some TL12 components in an elegant mix with a coherent and clean architectural style. Tradeport Down is locally known as just 'Down' and is famed for many parsecs for its blend of tall buildings and open spaces.

Buildings are constructed in blocks, typically with a central tower and several lower structures with open areas in between them, connected by roads and light railways at ground level. Towers have grav ports, although there are relatively few grav vehicles. Between the domestic blocks are parks, broad roadways and industrial complexes with a large downport located, unusually, in the centre of the city. This has a military section that is home to a rapid-response force using grav vehicles and aerospace interceptors. These alone could crush any military opposition mounted by the states of Beyjou.

As with the orbital installation the first impression is of clean elegance but the Travellers are familiar with a starfaring society that has the resources to undertake such projects more thoroughly. Some crewmembers may see Down as a haven of civilisation after years

in the wilderness; others may get the impression of yokels trying to copy a proper high-tech city and falling disappointingly short.

Prices are very high for TL12 items and even higher for anything that cannot be bought off the shelf. Most high-tech goods on sale are aimed at an audience used to TL8, so tend to be better versions of what would normally be on the market in such a society rather than the goods the Travellers may be hoping for. However, local industry will take orders for items and can produce almost anything once retooling is complete. The Travellers have a chance to obtain spares for their ship, vehicles and equipment but also luxuries like electronic goods and clothing that was not made from alien grass fibres in a shipboard fabric extruder. This, of course, supposes the Travellers can obtain local currency somehow.

Beyjou

Beyjou is a perfectly habitable world, although its atmosphere is a little thin and some areas are very dry. The world was seeded with humans in the very distant past and after the usual cycle of good and bad fortune was home to around 700 million people when the founders of Tradeport arrived. About half the population were at the time dwelling in small TL4–5 states, with the remainder scattered all over the globe in tribal communities.

Beyjou was chosen as the site for what became Tradeport largely because the planet would be able to provide a workforce and plenty of basic agricultural goods to support them. Those states willing to do business with the founders on favourable terms were rewarded with technological assistance programmes that, although modest, allowed an advance to a sustainable TL8 industrial base. Others were forced to take what they could get, with the result that overall Tech Level is 8 for Tradeport partners and TL6 or occasionally TL7 for those who came late to the party. Some of the tribal groups have been co-opted by Tradeport but most live as they always have.

Beyjou is balkanised, in the sense that it has no central government but conflict is uncommon. Tradeport discourages friction in its own backyard and uses economic leverage – and very occasionally force – to correct those who stray too far from its preferred path. Some of the states have discovered that concessions can be obtained by rattling the sabre at the right time

and play a dangerous game of brinkmanship whenever some external problem distracts the attention of Tradeport itself.

Tradeport as an Interstellar Power

Tradeport might be considered a corporate government or a feudal technocracy depending on viewpoint. It is run by the successors of leaders among the original founders, mostly on a hereditary basis. The relationship between these leaders is generally harmonious and cooperative, although agendas do differ on some issues. Each of the leaders has their own powerbase that might be diversified or concentrated in an economic sector or geographical location. The fortunes of each are wrapped around those of the others, so it would require an enormously good opportunity to break the united front presented by the leaders of Tradeport.

Tradeport is highly influential throughout the region. Measures as simple as reducing or raising prices on certain commodities will realign the attitudes of cities or small states and those that will not take the hint may see themselves excluded from the marketplace altogether. Direct action is very rarely taken but Tradeport is not above hiring mercenaries or paying pirates to do its dirty work. This is seen as distasteful and would only be done in serious circumstances.

Known pirates frequent Tradeport but are expected to maintain the polite fiction that they are mercenaries or legitimate paramilitary starship operators. Tradeport does not enforce laws in other systems but will put a bounty on a pirate who attacks its ships or raids its client markets. Tradeport is also the only source of high-quality starship repairs for many parsecs so alienating its rulers is generally considered a bad idea. There are many who say that Tradeport could do much more to pacify the region and chooses not to in order to exploit the situation. By creating a sea full of sharks, Tradeport ensures that only those strong enough not to be attacked will prosper.

Ultimately, the goal of Tradeport has not changed. The intention was to create an interstellar state centred on the orbital city and the leaders are still working towards that. However, their attention is distracted by the day-to-day need to stay afloat and to find ways to make necessary repairs. Tradeport is in a downward spiral and needs to break out somehow. The leaders are amenable to a deal whereby the Travellers help them kickstart some of their projects or deal with problems that have recently arisen.

REACHING THE FAR SIDE OF NOWHERE

It is probable the Travellers will cross the Great Rift at a point that brings them into local space more or less directly coreward of FSN-X. The inhabited areas of FSN are at least two sectors away, across a region virtually unexplored by the local powers. Many adventures are possible during this time, in systems created by the Referee at need. However, two incidents will occur that should guide the Travellers to an installation named Tradeport.

THE GREAT RIFT SHORE

Few rifts are characterised by a clearly defined cut-off point. Most have a 'shore' at least dozen or so parsecs deep where the stellar density is low or areas of rift – commonly referred to as inlets – exist between denser areas. Navigating the shore should not require deep space refuelling, although it may require some long jumps between widely separated star systems.

Once *Deepright Revelation* is 10–12 parsecs from the 'official' edge of the Great Rift, stellar density should be normal and progress can be made at whatever speed seems appropriate. Star systems in this region are much the same as anywhere else, with similar distribution of stellar types and planetary systems. The Travellers will likely head rimward but may choose to meander about investigating points of interest or looking for a source of necessary materials. There are no starfaring civilisations in this region and no signs any ever existed.

The system designated FS-02-K6 is a reasonable prospect for a garden world and therefore worth a look according to the scientific staff. If the Travellers decline, the events below can take place in any system the Travellers choose to visit.

FS-02-K6 is a typical star system, other than its innermost orbit. This is occupied by a pair of small (Size 1) rockballs closely orbiting one another at high speed. Landing on such bodies is always tricky but can be done if the pilot is skilled and careful. The pair may be dwarf planets orphaned from the planetoid belt in the third orbit, which is of typical composition. Most other bodies are rockballs, with a small gas giant in the outer orbit.

FS-02-K6 PRIMARY (K6 Star)

Primary 1	Binary Planet
Primary 2	(X420000-0)
Primary 3	(X000000-0)
Primary 4	(X779000-0)
Primary 5	(X310000-0)
Primary 6	(X510000-0)
Primary 7	(Small Gas Giant)

Primary 4 is of interest. It has a standard, if tainted, atmosphere and plenty of water. Although the average surface temperature is rather low, the planet has life. It is characterised by sheet ice in the higher latitudes, with a habitable zone stretching about 30 degrees north and south of the equator. Most of this zone is water but there is enough land to be considered a small continent and a few island archipelagos.

The logical choice would be to send *Deepright Revelation* to refuel at the gas giant whilst parties land from small craft at the habitable world. Initial analysis suggests a compatible biosphere, so resupply is an option. There are no particularly dangerous creatures on land, although the cold seas contain some very large predators. Indeed, there should be no setbacks to a resupply mission unless the Travellers or their crew make mistakes.

Refuelling is also routine, although that does not necessarily translate to safe. However, during routine inspections carried out after a jump, the engineering crew find indications worrying enough to ask for a couple of days to conduct a proper investigation. This is not a problem; there are in-system transits and a resupply operation to be carried out. However, what the inspection finds is potentially very serious.

WARNING SIGNS

The jump drive has developed a fault that is not yet dangerous but will become so. Internal fatigue has weakened many components that will require removal and re-machining, with some replaced entirely. This is a huge job and one that would normally require a dockyard. The most optimistic estimates put the repair time in multiple weeks and more probably months if carried out in space, although the duration could be

reduced to 10–15 days with access to even a basic dockyard. This would be preferable; an in-space repair might not fully succeed in which case the degradation process would begin anew, only faster.

The fault is not yet serious enough to threaten the survival of the ship and the drive can be used as normal for now. However, it will soon become unsafe to run the drive at its full capacity, reducing jump capability to 3 in a few jumps' time. Degradation is likely to proceed at an increasing pace after that, to the point where even at minimal capacity the drive has an increasing chance of catastrophic failure.

At the same time, there are indications that the situation is not as bad as it might be. Weak radio signals are being picked up. It is not possible to say where they originate other than to rimward, nor to estimate distance. However, it does seem that one or more civilisations may be found ahead. A dockyard might be available within a few jumps.

The ship's scientists and engineers will suggest a cautious but optimistic course of action. They advise the Travellers to push on for a while, seeking the source of the transmissions, but to be willing to halt and carry out the long repair in space if nothing useful is found within 2–3 months. The Travellers might of course decide to do something else entirely or conduct the repair immediately. If so, they will be stuck in orbit over this frozen planet for up to four months and at the end of it their drive will be safe for now but likely to begin degrading soon. A proper overhaul will still be desirable, even if the worst of the problem has been resolved.

CONTACT

In another star system, anywhere on their route, the Travellers detect a jump emergence soon after finishing their refuelling. The new arrival is a 400-ton vessel whose jump signature seems conventional. The ship's outline is not known but whereas the crashed ship encountered at the end of *The Crossing* was very rounded and had a sense of Droyne influences this one is much more angular. Indeed, it is almost familiar in its configuration.

The vessel begins transmitting and again there is something familiar about it. The communications protocols are not dissimilar to those in use aboard *Deepnight Revelation* and when they are decoded the language in use sounds vaguely like Anglic. At first the transmission is audio-only but as the technicians work through the protocols they are suddenly able to fully interface with the other ship, transmitting video back and forth. This is quite a surprise, as establishing a communications protocol with most of the intelligent species thus far encountered was a rather lengthy process.

There is another surprise, too. The crew of the other ship are human.

There may be a moment of puzzlement at both ends of the conversation. Up to this point the distorted voice of the other ship's captain was asking who the Travellers were, what species, what their intentions might be and in a rather nervous manner as might be expected. Now the other captain – a light-skinned brunette woman who would look entirely in place on the bridge of *Deepnight Revelation* – gives vent to a stream of archaic but recognisable cuss-words and asks; '*You're not Commonwealth, you're bigger than the whole Empire, and you'd better not be Republic. Who are you people?*'

Her words are littered with archaic expletives that the linguistics database describes as probably Terran in origin. The Referee could have some fun humourlessly describing the meanings of common vulgarities and obscenities and how they have drifted from their origins on late Long Night Terra. Captain Milena Clayton (see page 96) did not learn to swear on Earth but her meaning is clear to anyone who speaks a related language.

This does raise a number of questions. Not only are there humans in the Far Side of Nowhere but they came from or had contact with Charted Space around the time the Third Imperium was being founded. There seem to be multiple powers in the region and by the sound of it there is at the very least some friction between them. For her part Captain Clayton is wary of such a big, powerful unknown starship and has positioned her vessel to make a rapid jump if the Travellers seem threatening. On the other hand she is curious about the Travellers and wants to find out more – and to figure out how to profit from their arrival. Unless the Travellers scare her off she will stay and talk.

Clayton and Her Ship

Captain Milena Clayton was once – not all that many years ago – a sublieutenant in the armed forces of the Federated Commonwealth of Homeworlds. She resigned her commission as a result of a dispute with her commanding officer, who she maintains was a complete incompetent who will sooner or later get people killed and pass the blame on to a subordinate. The reality is not quite so harsh; there was wrong on both sides but Clayton is not the sort to admit fault. She hired on as an astrogator aboard an independent starship and by means of some rather hard-nosed politicking ended up as its captain.

She has made herself unpopular in many ports, gradually moving further from the Commonwealth as her reputation caught up with her. Clayton is not a

criminal but bargains very hard and has no mercy when another party is in need. She would not resort to piracy or raiding but is quite happy to profit from a crisis by charging ridiculous prices for necessary goods or forcing a one-sided contract on a client in return for carrying out a desperately needed mission.

Clayton got rid of her former crewmates, mostly by bullying them until they quit, and replaced them with a crew she was happy with. They are not the most effective or efficient starfarers but are reliable and compliant. Some are active supporters of Clayton and her arrogant profiteering; others are willing to live like this for a few months and collect the oversized salaries Clayton pays to those who do her bidding without complaint.

Her ship is named *Clayton's Chariot* and is of a design produced in the Commonwealth for use on the frontiers or in backwater areas with little law enforcement. Built under license in several ports, the *Distant Ranger* class was developed as a multirole vessel for the commercial and government markets. It is lightly armoured and equipped with four hardpoints that usually mount at least a basic self-defence armament.

Hull form is typical for the Commonwealth, with a generally rectangular central hull and two secondary hulls – also generally rectangular – offset slightly down from the main hull. These have a highly adjustable multi-landing-foot arrangement, which widely spreads the load of the ship when it is grounded. The feet can lie flush with the lower hull surface or extend up to a metre downwards to account for uneven ground, enabling the vessel to rest on its secondary hulls.

Each of these secondary hulls takes up 100 tons of the ship's volume and is mostly consumed by a pair of 40-ton fuel/cargo containers. These actually have a capacity of 38 tons of fuel or cargo, with the remaining two tons taken up by machinery. The *Distant Ranger* class has a reduced-fuel jump drive requiring 38 tons of fuel per parsec so each fuelled container allows a one-parsec jump, to a maximum of two parsecs per jump dictated by the drive. Capacity not needed for fuel can be used for cargo, although this is an all or nothing consideration – it is not possible to carry some cargo and some fuel in a single module. The ship can be set up for two two-parsec jumps if necessary, a useful capability when in governmental or paramilitary hands, or when operating on the frontiers, and can run without jump fuel on an in-system transit.

Fuel scoops and processing equipment are located at the fore end of the secondary hulls and between the two fuel/cargo areas is a tiny power plant room containing a one-ton fusion plant and a console for operating the

turrets located on the outer surface of the hull. A one-ton munitions bay feeds each of these turrets but on many ships it is used as a secure cargo area instead. On Clayton's ship these outer turrets are equipped with a pair of missile racks and a beam laser for point defence. The lasers are lethal against ground targets in an almost 180-degree arc around the sides of the vessel.

The remaining tonnage of the secondary hulls is taken up with airlocks, cargo space and machinery for the ground operations shelter. This rather grandly named apparatus is a set of retractable shields at the fore and aft ends of the secondary hulls and a set of flooring bars that extend from one to the other. The result is an enclosed space, with an even floor the length of the secondary hulls. It can be used as a marshalling area, working space, vehicle garage or – as Captain Clayton likes to do – an indoor bazaar where yokels can be fleeced of their cash with shiny offworld goods. Shelters of this sort are not uncommon on ships operating in the FSN region; the one fitted to the *Distant Ranger* makes good use of the existing hull structures to create a larger space.

The main hull sits atop the two secondaries in the manner of a catamaran. Entry is normally by way of airlocks at the centre of the two secondary hulls but there is also a retractable staircase and cargo elevator that can be lowered between them. With or without the shelter deployed, this creates an easily controlled access point into the central hull.

Layout of the main hull is conventional in most ways. The bridge and command spaces are forward, with a block of four staterooms and an eight-ton common area immediately aft. The central section contains the brig, armoury, medical bay and workshop, with a small cargo bay sitting atop the freight elevator. Aft of this is another stateroom block and common area, aft of that the drive chamber. Weapons turrets are mounted on the dorsal surface above the bridge and drive rooms.

The *Distant Ranger* class was never envisaged as a passenger vessel. Its cabins are intended to be used by crew or officials being transported from one place to another and there is little provision for separating passengers from working spaces. Cargo capacity, assuming two parsecs' worth of fuel are carried, is a respectable 56 tons with the capability to transfer fuel or cargo to another vessel in space. Ships of this sort are typically found in governmental service as support and supply ships or light exploration platforms and fulfill all manner of roles in private hands. Whilst not competitive on a safe internal route, *Distant Ranger* class vessels are tough and self-reliant, leading to a low loss rate when operating in the wilds.

SMALL MULTIROLE VESSEL

DISTANT RANGER

TL12		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	400 tons, Standard	—	20
	Reinforced Hull	—	10
Armour	Crystaliron, Armour: 2	10	3
M-Drive	Thrust 3	12	24
Jump Drive	Jump 2, Advanced (decreased fuel)	25	41.25
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 330	22	22
Fuel Tanks	20 weeks of operation	11	—
Fuel/Cargo Module	J-2 x2 (4x40 cargo/fuel modules)	160	0.8
Bridge		20	2
Computer	Computer/20	—	5
Sensors	Improved	3	4.3
Weapons	Dual Turrets (pulse lasers) x2	2	5
	Triple Turrets (beam laser, missile racks x2) x2	2	5
Ammunition	1-ton Munitions Stowage Areas x2	2	—
Systems	Fuel Processor (80 tons/day)	4	0.2
	Cargo Crane	3	3
	Armoury	2	0.5
	Brig	4	0.25
	Medical Bay	4	2
	Workshop	6	0.9
	UNREP System (40 tons/hour)	2	1
	Retractable External Shelter (40 ton coverage)	1.6	0.16
Staterooms	Standard x8	32	4
Common Areas		16	1.6
Software	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
	Jump Control/2	—	0.2
	Library	—	—
Cargo		56	—
TOTAL: MCr 156.16			

CREW

CAPTAIN, PILOT,
ASTROGATOR, ENGINEERS X2,
MEDIC, GUNNERS X4

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST
Cr13013/month

PURCHASE COST
MCr156.16

POWER REQUIREMENTS

120

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

80

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

80

JUMP DRIVE

4

SENSORS

20

WEAPONS

4

FUEL PROCESSOR



LEGEND

1. Sensors
2. Bridge
3. Staterooms
4. Common area
5. Fresher
6. Ship's locker
7. Med bay
8. Brig
9. Armoury
10. Workshop
11. UNREP
12. Freight lift
13. Cargo hold
14. Crane
15. Fuel processor
16. Triple turret
17. Cargo/fuel module

176

HULL POINTS

18. Tiny power plant
19. Turret console
20. Ammo storage
21. Power plant
22. Jump drive
23. Manoeuvre drive
24. Dual turret.



A Conversation with Captain Clayton

Clayton is willing to exchange information, which is not the same thing as answering any question the Travellers ask. She expects meaningful answers to her own questions, of which she has plenty. She wants to know where the Travellers came from, if more ships are following and what their intentions might be. Between the lines she wants to know if and how she can profit from the Travellers' arrival or if she needs to relocate to a different area of space.

In return for what she wants to know, Clayton can provide a great deal of basic information about the local powers. However, she knows information is valuable and that for the present she is the only source available to the Travellers. She is also a little biased. The Commonwealth is her home but she is resentful towards its military, which she feels forced her out of what would have been a stellar career.

Clayton will convey the following basic facts without asking much in return. If the Travellers want more they will have to bargain with her.

- The dominant starfaring race are humans. Humans come from a world called Terra but it is far off and Clayton does not know how to get there.
- There are also Droyne in the region. Most of them live on Commonwealth worlds but there are independent Droyne homeworlds.
- There are significant neo-barbarian populations (of both humans and Droyne) on worlds outside the main powers.
- The main powers are the Commonwealth and the Grand Republic. The Empire will also claim to be a major power but they are not. It is generally better to treat their emissaries as if they were, although.
- The Commonwealth is a federation of homeworlds and their possessions. Its military wastes talent over petty politics and promotes incompetents for failure (Clayton will go off on a swearsy rant at this point).
- The Grand Republic is a much tighter organisation. Clayton used to hear bad things about the Grand Republic 'back home' but has since met some of their ship crews and they seemed okay. Very smartly turned out, nice ships, not trigger-happy goons at all.
- The Empire is a bunch of trigger-happy goons and that is the best you can say about them. They are the nearest major starfaring power. Imagine a sack full of cats that only stop clawing one another long enough to gang up on someone else. Mean, vindictive, very dangerous. Fortunately, Clayton can help deal with them.

- Clayton's ship is on a contract to a merchant consortium operating out of Tradeport. Her mission is 'trade scouting', which basically means seeding local low and mid-tech worlds with cheap goods in order to create a demand. Follow-up missions make a killing.
- Tradeport is the only major starport around here. It was set up by someone a while ago because... reasons, probably. Who cares? It is a neutral port with decent facilities and safe enough if you tread carefully. Fortunately the Travellers have met Clayton, who knows everyone and can keep them out of trouble.

Clayton is, rather obviously, trying to set herself up as a middleman. She is willing to let certain information go cheap or for free if it suits her purposes. In particular, she wants the Travellers to think they are entering a minefield of dangerous local politics (which is more or less true) and that they cannot survive without her help. If the Travellers are courteous or allow Clayton to position herself where she wants to be, she will scrub her current mission to go with them to Tradeport. If not, the Travellers will encounter her again when she gets back from her present voyage.

Heading for Tradeport

Tradeport is both a specific installation and a general reference to a region of several star systems surrounding it. Any world within a jump or two is heavily influenced by the economics and politics of Tradeport and will have offworld goods available. The Referee should place the fringe of this region a couple of jumps away, generally to rimward. As the Travellers approach they will encounter worlds with a low or mid-tech human population who have offworld goods available to them. A common theme is that many communities are dependent on these goods; power plants, medical facilities and the like have been sold to them in such a way that they can no longer live without a supply of spares and components from Tradeport.

The Travellers will also receive alarming reports from their engineering staff. The jump drive is degrading at an increasing rate and needs a full overhaul in the very near future. If this Tradeport place has any sort of dockyard the Travellers can cut months off the time required to dismantle and rebuild the drive. If not, the best thing to do would be to gather components and raw materials, then find somewhere to hole up for months whilst the drive is repaired.

EN ROUTE TO TRADEPORT

Captain Clayton can direct the Travellers to Tradeport, although they are quite capable of locating it themselves. She is keen to get there ahead of them but may not realise *Deepnight Revelation* is capable of jumping far further than any local ship. If she does figure this out Clayton will try to contrive a way to get to Tradeport first without antagonising the Travellers. The simplest way is for them to take her ship aboard theirs. Clayton realises she is trusting total strangers by doing so and some of her crew are very nervous. However, it is her best option to profit from the Travellers' arrival and affords her additional opportunities.

Clayton wants to find out as much as she can about the Travellers and the technology of their vessel. Living aboard it during the transit to Tradeport is an excellent way to do that and, if necessary, she will do everything she can to secure an invitation. Clayton knows how to be charming and just helpful enough to build goodwill, which she then ruthlessly exploits. She is genuinely impressed with the ship, and this will become apparent as time goes on, but she is also first and foremost a self-centred opportunist. She does not know how best to profit from the Travellers' arrival but by the time she gets to Tradeport she hopes to have a much better idea.

Clayton can supply basic navigational information on the systems between Tradeport and the Travellers' location and, of course, to be most useful she will need to learn a few basic facts about the ship. The Travellers may be surprised at just how much she knows within a few days. Clayton never asks a lot, and never from the same source if she can help it, but each piece of information is a lead-in to the next. She can, however, be useful.

At some point in the transit *Deepnight Revelation* enters a backwater system with a habitable planet. Clayton tells the Travellers it is named Naisar, which more or less means 'home' in a local dialect. The population are low-tech humans who have formed a few large states. Not much of a market to make money at, Clayton says, but the sort of place you can resupply and spend a shore leave living like a king for the price of a few drop-forged tools. The locals are used to the odd ship passing through and are generally keen to trade. Clayton naturally offers to lead any negotiation and make use of her contacts.

The Travellers will not find out whether or not Clayton actually knows anyone on Naisar. As they enter orbit, sensor readings indicate a mature TL3 society, with extensive use of steam power on land but relying on sailing ships for commerce. Settlement patterns indicate several widely spaced states linked by sea trade but one of them stands out. Clayton thinks it is the Kingdom of Raille but confesses her local knowledge is patchy. This is believable; on a balkanised world like this a starfarer might not learn anything about any state other than the one they visit.

The capital of the Kingdom of Raille is a large city by local standards, home to perhaps 100,000 people. It was an impressive place a few days ago but now it is burning. There are large fires out of control at several points and the Travellers will be able to make out signs of local disaster response – such as it is. There are a couple of sailing ships labouring up the nearby river towards the city, a steam-powered firefighting boat doing its pathetic best, trains racing to and from the city and mobs of people spilling out into the countryside to escape the flames.

Clayton flippantly states '*well, we'll not be landing there, then,*' and seems content to leave it at that. She will be genuinely puzzled if the Travellers seem to care what is happening planetside – after all, there are plenty of other yokels to fleece. If the Travellers take more than a passing interest they will begin to realise the city has been attacked with weapons capable of causing intense fires – more than likely starship-grade lasers. Again, commenting on this will puzzle Clayton. '*Yeah, they got hit. Sucks to be them,*' she says, or something like it with more swearing. Clayton is baffled if the Travellers seem to care.

If pressed, and with genuine puzzlement the Travellers do not know and actually care, Clayton will explain that planetary raiding is common in this region. Much of it is carried out by independents with a small ship or two to their name but the nastiest raiders are from the Empire of Envais. This bunch of jumped-up (much swearing) narcissistic psychopaths have built their so-called empire on plunder from backwater worlds like this.

It will be obvious to the Travellers that a low-tech world like Naisar can provide little of significant value and that damage done would be out of all proportion to the booty taken. A raid such as the one that has just taken place will wreck the local economy for years to come – to say nothing of the human cost – and will set back the development of the planet by an even greater margin. This is an immensely destructive short-term strategy that could never be sustainable. Clayton's description of the perpetrators might be pretty accurate.

THE RAID

The raid was indeed carried out by forces from the Empire of Envais. Two ships commanded by officers loyal to Earl Egrane, a minor but noisy member of the Empire's nobility who has a base at Tradeport, landed two days ago and demanded tribute 'per existing arrangements'. There were no arrangements in place as such but ships from a rival noble's entourage robbed the city a couple of years back, which is good enough for Earl Egrane.

With no viable alternatives, the local ruler did his best to scrape together the extortionate 'tribute' demanded by Egrane's men but the demands just kept getting steeper. Eventually a palace official protested too much and was shot out of hand. The locals fought back as best they could and succeeded in killing and injuring a few of Egrane's gunmen. The remainder retreated to their ships with the booty they had already taken and took off, working the city over with laser fire from a few hundred metres above.

The two ships then left orbit and jumped out just hours before *Deepnight Revelation* arrived. The ships were both Mallin-2 raiders (see page 90), although the locals can only describe them by appearance – they are not familiar with starship classification. Likewise, the names of the ships are unlikely to be known to the locals but they are *Bindley's Barge* and *Great Deals!*. Both ships are registered out of Envais and are notorious in the region as typical trader/raiders.

HELPING RAILLE

If the Travellers decide to help there is much they can do but the first obstacle is local resistance. The locals have just been raided and their previous interactions with starfarers amounted to extortion or at best one-sided dealings. The locals do have communications equipment – a TL10 personal comm wired up to a large antenna at the royal palace – and will respond to signals. However, the locals' response is little more than a litany of 'we have nothing else to take, the city is on fire and we will snipe at your people if you land'.

This viewpoint will be hard to shift by words alone but the Travellers can demonstrate their intentions without putting anyone at risk. Their small craft are designed to take up water in their fuelling hoses. Normally it would be held for cracking into hydrogen but the fuelling system could be turned into a makeshift fire hose. Modifications can be made that will allow cargo craft to carry a lot more water.

Other options include landing out of rifle range and depositing a heap of emergency supplies then pulling back or plunging into the burning areas where local personnel cannot go and saving lives whether the local ruler likes it or not. There are people cut off and almost certainly doomed unless rescued from the air; getting them out would be a demonstration of good intentions nobody could argue with.

The Travellers can help almost anywhere. A shipboard firefighting suit would allow personnel to operate in areas the locals cannot and a hostile environment suit could walk straight through any blaze. The Travellers might blast firebreaks, rescue people, dump unimaginable amounts of water on the heart of the blaze or offer advanced medical assistance unavailable anywhere on the planet.

The crisis point, in humanitarian terms at least, is the main railway terminus in the southern quarter of the city. People have been flocking there in the hope of riding a train to safety but with the fire approaching they have nowhere to go. There are thousands of people jammed into an area that is steadily getting smaller and although there are still a few ways to get out on foot around the fire, finding them at ground level is not possible.

The Travellers might be able to fight the fire in some areas, holding it back or even putting a section out. There is also the possibility of landing personnel to lead the population through the decreasing safe corridors. The practical challenges are easy to overcome – a simple data feed from a hovering craft will show safe routes – but getting people to follow a starfarer might be more difficult.

There is little to gain, in monetary terms, from helping with the aftermath of the raid. The local ruler, styling himself Prince Harerri of Raille, will want to meet with the Travellers and offer them hospitality but his city's stocks of precious metals and jewellery were comprehensively looted and his palace shows signs of combat in the courtyard. It was not fired upon as the raiders left, presumably as a business decision; Prince Harerri thinks the raiders intend to come back at some point and want someone in charge to round up tribute for them. From what he has heard the raiders

are interested in repeated plunder rather than wanton destruction, although they seem quite willing to destroy one target in order to make others more willing to hand over the demanded ransom.

The Travellers could probably provide the cities of Naisar with weaponry to deter a raid, or at least make one too costly to repeat, but they do not have the resources to do this for everyone. Likewise, they are quite capable of driving off raiders but have a mission of their own to complete. It is possible the Travellers will experience conflicting emotions upon realising this – these people need help but they would have to abandon their mission and their duty to the folks back home in order to make a difference. The obvious option is to destroy the raiders' ships but this, too, is more complicated than it might at first seem.

TRADING ON NAISAR

The city of Raille has next to nothing to offer the Travellers and helping Raille does not win them much in the way of credit with the other cities. If the Travellers want something they will have to trade for it – and that includes goods and food to help Raille recover. Fortunately, the locals are used to a grossly unfair exchange rate and may marvel at how generous the Travellers are being, whilst the Travellers feel they are gouging the local merchants. Captain Clayton will object if the Travellers do anything other than rip the locals off, since the last thing she wants is them realising they can get far better prices than she would normally offer. She may suggest that she should handle trade. Even after skimming off some for herself she will get the Travellers a lot more for their money than they would normally expect.

Trade is likely to be in terms of barter for goods and foodstuffs but the locals will take precious metals and have currency in the form of Commonwealth Credits. These may intrigue the Travellers and perhaps inspire them to start considering how they could be counterfeited. Commonwealth Credits are manufactured at TL12 and incorporate the best anti-counterfeiting technology the Commonwealth can devise but a TL15 starship may be able to get around some or even all of the challenges inherent in creating copies. This might make the visit to Naisar rather more profitable than it first seems.

ARRIVING AT TRADEPORT

The arrival of *Deepnight Revelation* at Tradeport will cause quite a stir. In all probability, even with a questionable drive, the Travellers can still outpace news of their arrival in the region. The only way Captain

HELP, DON'T HELP OR TAKE ADVANTAGE?

The Travellers are under no obligation to help anyone and could simply ignore the situation. This would not sit well with some of the crew, especially those whose prior careers were in honourable military or civilian service. This is one way the Travellers might generate adventures, albeit ones revolving around unpleasant internal tension and perhaps even mutiny. If the Travellers do decide to ignore the situation, so be it. The Referee should not attempt to railroad them into playing out an adventure if they do not want to. There is a major difference between logical in-game consequences of action or inaction and Referee intervention to rob the Travellers of their free will.

If the Travellers do not assist at Naisar, nobody will comment on it or think any less of them. If they do, they will surprise Clayton and her crew (*'what, are you the good guys or something?'*) who will spill the tale the next time they are in a portside bar. Most are astonished that the Travellers would risk taking casualties for a bunch of yokels – some think this is stupid and others admirable but everyone will find it noteworthy. This will garner the Travellers some goodwill once word gets around but it is a two-edged sword. The Travellers may find themselves being badgered by everyone with any sort of problem.

The Travellers might get the idea that planetary raiding is a good idea. This will be unacceptable to most of the crew unless there are desperate circumstances or the voyage has resulted in a self-centred and cynical attitude. 'True believers' in the mission's ultimate purpose might accept the necessity. If the crew can stomach taking what they want at gunpoint they have the firepower to do it. Most local starfarers will find this somewhat objectionable but it is not so uncommon as to generate outrage. Certainly the Travellers will be considered no worse than the Empire, although that is a questionable distinction.

Clayton will get to Tradeport before the Travellers is if they carry her ship aboard theirs – which is a viable option if she thinks it will benefit her – or if the Travellers make some side trips.



There will be local ships in the systems around Tradeport, carrying out routine commercial activity for the most part. Their reactions will vary; some will send wary greetings, some will immediately change course away from the monstrous intruder. The system defence flotilla will begin concentrating, as if it had the slightest chance of harming *Deepnight Revelation*, and a priority message is sent by the port administration. If the Travellers have not met local ships and established communications protocols this situation could be fraught for some time until contact can be established. A prompt and courteous response will go some way towards allaying fears.

The Travellers will find themselves dealing directly with Marcus Fiesler – that is, Chief Executive Marcus Fiesler, head of the Tradeport Consortium. Fiesler is the nearest thing to a ruler this system has and almost never deals directly with anyone but a major power's ambassador. Of course, 75,000 tons of heavy cruiser is a powerful statement and Fiesler feels the circumstances merit the personal touch.

Fiesler is grandly dressed in a robe of furs and expensive natural fibres over a sober but hideously expensive business suit. He is keen to learn about the newcomers and their intentions, and offers a priority docking for an ambassadorial party at his private shuttle bay. In the meantime he requests that *Deepnight Revelation* keeps her distance from the orbital station to avoid 'perturbing the shipping schedule' – by which he means scaring the bejeezus out of the small ships using the port.

If the Travellers or their representatives take up the offer of a meeting, they are directed to a private bay and a flight of fighters is launched as an honour escort for the Travellers' shuttle. Tradeport will not object to the Travellers providing their own escort flight as well and indeed will be puzzled if they do not. During the approach it is obvious that the local fighters are reaction-drive models and are carrying out only very careful and uncomplicated manoeuvres. Whether this is because the pilots do not want to spook the new arrivals or because they are simply not very good is an open question.

The half-built and dilapidated state of the orbital station is obvious as the Travellers approach but the executive docking area is well appointed and entirely functional. Once the Travellers' shuttle has landed, the reception party enters the bay. The Travellers have seen this sort of thing before; a local power putting on a show. They actually do a pretty good job, with a double column of smartly uniformed security personnel forming an approach guard and a band playing a grand and oddly familiar march. If the Travellers care to find out, it is based on the March of the Victorious Pilots from an Old Earth opera of Interstellar Wars vintage.

The Tradeport delegation fully expects armed guards to accompany the Travellers, although anyone with a longarm would be expected to be in dress uniform and performing a ceremonial function. Sidearms are entirely acceptable if worn with formal dress that would normally be accompanied by them and plausible explanations for combinations that seem a bit off will be politely taken at face value.

CLAYTON

If Captain Clayton is at Tradeport when the Travellers arrive she will make contact as quickly as possible and offer to handle the 'tricky' contact with the locals. If she is aboard *Deepnight Revelation* she will offer the same. In fact, the only person who will benefit from such an action is Clayton herself (as usual) and her presence with the Travellers will suggest affiliations that colour the reaction of some local factions to the Travellers. Clayton is not a pleasant character, although she is no pirate or raider, and has offended several important local figures with her hard dealings and habit of changing one end of a deal once circumstances favour her.

If Clayton is excluded from the contact process she will be annoyed but not show it. She will hold this 'slight' against the Travellers – she is incapable of seeing it in any other way. To Clayton, the Travellers are being foolish by rejecting her help and insulting her in a way she does not deserve. The fact that she would be very reluctant to do business with someone who behaved like herself is of no consequence to her.

If she is included in the process Clayton will try to make it all about her. She wants to wring concessions for herself out of the Tradeport authorities, using the threat of the Travellers' powerful ship, and out of the Travellers with the idea that the local situation is much more dangerous than it actually is. Clayton will try to manoeuvre herself into the position of negotiating directly with Fiesler on behalf of the Travellers without them present. If she can manage this she will present the Travellers with a good deal – but she will have negotiated a great one and kept those proceeds for herself.

Fiesler is accompanied by a group of suited assistants – the usual lawyer, personal physician and collection of errand-runners and aides. The Travellers can amuse themselves trying to figure out which ones are bodyguards if they like. Fiesler welcomes the Travellers to Tradeport in a rather flowery fashion, making assurances of a mutually beneficial relationship and long years of friendship. He looks askance at Clayton if she is present and will consider the Travellers' association with her a slightly negative point.

MAKING A DEAL

There is much the Tradeport Consortium and the Travellers can do for one another, although first it will be necessary to establish what each wants and needs. This is a difficult process, as neither side is likely to want to admit their vulnerabilities. It may be that low-level trade will take place first, with trust built over time, or that one side will have to delicately point out that they know the other has a need they have not presented.

A workable deal will satisfy the needs of both parties. The Travellers can offer high-tech spares and components plus expertise, as well as the firepower of their ship of course. They need the services of a dockyard to shorten the drive repair time. Tradeport does not have one capable of repairing such a big vessel but does have a decommissioned dockyard vessel that could greatly assist with the job if it were returned to service.

Getting the dockyard ship up and running would be of great benefit to the Tradeport Consortium and might allow construction work on the orbital city to begin anew. Fiesler and his partners would like to obtain the secrets of advanced jump drives and power generation technology, among other things, but whilst these are immensely valuable in the long term the consortium's ends are best served by obtaining practical and immediately useful benefits.

Fiesler will offer a deal whereby the Travellers and their crew 'help with some problems' in return for use of the dockyard ship, unlimited supplies, stores and spares if they are available and priority status at Tradeport for all personnel. He will provide *Deepnight Revelation* with a line of credit at the port that can be used to obtain services or local currency. How much of the credit needs to be paid back – in cash, items or services – depends on how the Travellers and their crew comport themselves. If they stay within sensible limits, Fiesler will write the whole lot off, or at least all of it that is spent in Tradeport or its planetside partners. This does include a certain amount of gambling in Tradeport's casinos and generally having a good time, as it all goes back into the local economy anyway.

Fiesler's deal is as follows:

- The Travellers will assist him in getting the dockyard ship back into functional order, by providing expertise and fabricating missing components.
- The dockyard ship will then be made available to *Deepnight Revelation*, which will shorten the drive repair time by many weeks.

KEEPING TRACK OF THE MONEY

Keeping track of the Travellers' expenditure at Tradeport – and that of their entire crew – would be an enormous task and is not really relevant to the overall storyline. The Referee should allow reasonable spending as part of the price of doing business unless the Travellers decide to exploit the situation. For example, if the Travellers insist on gambling on Fiesler's credit until they get lucky and win enough money to own Tradeport, he will shut them down. If, on the other hand, they take a couple of thousand Commonwealth Credits each to the casino and see what happens, Fiesler will accept this as fair enough.

Each time the Travellers want to make a big purchase or do something that pushes the limits of goodwill, the Referee should make a roll on the Goodwill table below (all listed DMs are cumulative) and keep a note of what Fiesler thinks the Travellers owe him. If they are really pushing it he will wait until *Deepnight Revelation* is dismantled for repairs then begin withholding services. Once the Travellers have paid off what Fiesler thinks he is owed, they can get on with fixing their ship.

This may cause a confrontation or even a fight. It may be that the Travellers end up staging a coup to take over Tradeport just to finish their repairs. Whilst

not an ideal solution this could work. However, the price will be high in lives and the Travellers will have earned the animosity of everyone who finds Tradeport's services useful.

Goodwill

2D	RESULT
2 or less	The request is declined. Fiesler cuts off credit and orders a halt to any assistance the Travellers are receiving until the matter is resolved.
3	The request is declined and Fiesler requests a meeting to discuss the matter. No further requests will be granted until it is resolved but credit for minor items is not cut off.
4	The request is declined or the items are unavailable.
5–8	The request is honoured but Fiesler comments that the Travellers are pushing it. DM-1 on the next roll on this table.
9–10	The request is honoured but DM-1 on the next roll on this table.
11–12	The request is honoured without comment or ill-feeling.

- During that time the Travellers will assist Fiesler with two other problems – one at Grit and the other at Wildwood – and he will arrange as much resupply as local resources can provide.

As far as possible, both parties will use their own resources to uphold their end of the deal, so the Travellers can be expected to use their scouts to deal with problems at Grit and Wildwood. If necessary Fiesler can arrange to have local ships placed at their disposal.

The deal can be extended into a major refit of *Deepnight Revelation* if the Travellers prefer. There are many minor issues that could be dealt with here. Most are annoying rather than threatening, such as problems with hot water or lighting but crew morale would be improved by an ergonomic and comfort-based refit. Replacing upholstery and fixing warped deck plate will give the ship a sense of renewal, which will benefit morale, as will eliminating annoying niggles like that section just aft of the command bridge where the internal gravity fluctuates ever so slightly

over time. These jobs will require pulling sections of the ship apart to make repairs, which is much simpler with a dockyard – even a basic mobile one – available.

Resolving an Issue

If the Travellers make only reasonable requests there will be no problems. Fiesler is getting what he wants out of the deal and is prepared to pay a fair price. However, if the Travellers want too much for nothing an issue will arise. Fiesler would prefer not to be confrontational but he also knows the value of demonstrating strength in negotiation.

If the Travellers presume too much or take liberties, Fiesler will want something in return for resuming his previously relaxed posture on what he will and will not provide. This will probably be a task he wants performed or some piece of equipment fabricated that will give him an economic edge over competitors. For example, the Travellers may be requested to build Fiesler a

factory using advanced machinery to cheaply produce high-quality TL12 electronics. Until this facility breaks down he will be able to undercut his competitors by producing locally useful items more cheaply, or with better function, than they can. He does not want super-advanced equipment he cannot sell or that will break down quickly; he wants an economic advantage in present market conditions.

If a task is imposed it will be relatively simple the first time, with few complications. The Travellers may be asked to streamline an industrial process or help with some building work on the exterior of the station. Their crew have the necessary skills or can apply techniques not known locally, without much effort. However, if the Travellers keep on asking for a bit much then Fiesler will start asking for more onerous or questionable favours. He may require the Travellers to 'come to an arrangement' with one of his competitors by demonstrating their power, or gather quantities of hard-to-obtain materials. Tasks will become more complex and time consuming as the Travellers ask for more from Fiesler.

Fixing the Dockyard Ship

Getting the dockyard ship up and running is a matter of time and effort for the crew of *Deepnight Revelation*. The locals lack much experience with this sort of thing but the crew have spent years maintaining a ship in deep space. This is bread and butter to them and indeed they may be amazed at how simple a lot of the problems are. This may lead to a certain contempt for 'dumbass locals' but really it is a question of experience and training rather than intellect or lack of it.

Getting the dockyard ship operational will still be quite a grind, probably taking 3–4 weeks. There is no need to play this out in detail unless the Travellers create adventure opportunities by having to chase careless workers who have fallen off the hull without a tether or negotiate for a necessary item. There are those who would throw obstacles in the way of the project for their own reasons, so getting involved with the details may embroil the Travellers in local politics. However, there is no need for this unless the Travellers are interested. They have plenty of negotiators and administrators to handle the details whilst the engineers deal with the physical work. Thus the dockyard ship and subsequent repair to *Deepnight Revelation's* drive can be going on in the background whilst the Travellers deal with more interesting problems.

Repairing the Drive

Repairing the jump drive aboard *Deepnight Revelation* is also, for the most part, a matter of breaking down the task into manageable chunks and steadily

grinding through it. It will be necessary to fabricate new components, re-machine others and occasionally backtrack to remove a part that has just been refurbished upon discovering another fault. However, on the whole this is something that does not really need the Travellers' close attention unless they are engineers.

Obviously, *Deepnight Revelation* cannot jump whilst her drive is in pieces and there will be stages during the repair when she cannot manoeuvre at all. These can be minimised by an incidence on returning the ship to operational status as quickly as possible after removal of any component but doing so will add a great deal of needless work to the overall task and lengthen it considerably. The Travellers may well consider this is worth the effort, since it minimises the periods during which the ship is helpless but it will annoy the engineering crew.

If the emphasis is placed on getting the job completed as quickly as possible, accepting the necessity of leaving the ship helpless at times, the job can be done in 2D+7 days, with the ship completely out of commission for 90% of this time and barely operable during the remainder. Emphasising security extends the duration to 2D+21 days, with the ship inoperable for 20% of this time, in short periods of just a few hours. A balanced approach takes 2D+14 days; the ship is inoperable for about half of this time, typically for a day or two at a time.

'Inoperable' in this context means that *Deepnight Revelation* cannot manoeuvre nor draw full power from her plants. Point-defence, minor weapons and life support all remain functional, as do the labs and scientific facilities.

During the repairs, the Travellers will become aware of local interest. Many factions will want to find out more about the ship and try to insinuate spies in work parties or delivery crews, or request diplomatic visits in order to get a close look. There may be deliberate stalling on deliveries of supplies or spares in order to facilitate reconnaissance of the ship. Most of this activity is more or less harmless at this point but the Travellers are still likely to be nervous once they realise that many local parties are interested in their ship and may try to take advantage of her disabled status.

THE GRIT SITUATION

Fiesler has two situations he wants help with. It does not matter what order the Travellers resolve these in but they both need to be handled. The first is at Grit, in the Hardslog system. As the name might suggest this is a place of economic value without much else to

recommend it. The Tradeport Consortium has invested a great deal in the extraction of mineral resources but output has been dropping for a while now. Queries from Tradeport result in vague responses to the effect that prospecting has not shown any good prospects lately or extraction has been very difficult but Fiesler suspects there is a lot more to it than that.

The task is simple enough on the face of it – send a team to Grit and find out what the problem is. If it can be solved quickly, do so. Fiesler is quite prepared to accept a ‘you don’t want to know the details’ outcome if he can deny involvement in anything questionable. The Travellers may choose to go themselves or send a delegation. If they do this themselves, it is up to the Referee whether the Travellers should then take on the roles of this delegation – which can be an interesting experience, seeing the mission from a different viewpoint – or to simply present a result.

If the Travellers do not take a hands-on approach, the delegation returns about 20 days after jumping to Hardslog and reports that they landed on the giant mining crawler known as Extraction One and tried to ascertain the local situation. Things seemed a bit tense and nobody wanted to answer questions. On the third day some locals started a fight in a bar and two of the expedition’s personnel were arrested. The rest of the team was ordered off the crawler and returned to their ship to avoid further problems. Two days of requests to see officials and resolve the matter produced only stonewalling. The team decided to return to *Deepnight Revelation* to seek assistance.

Fiesler is puzzled by this turn of events. The locals on Grit can be a rough and ready lot but they know which side their bread is buttered on. An incident like a barfight would normally be an excuse to demand compensation from the instigators, which is tolerated so long as it remains within limits. Normally the local authorities would be only too keen to discuss the matter with a ship operator – there is money to be made!

Fiesler thinks there is something serious going on aboard Extraction One and urges the Travellers to deal with it. Their crewmembers may or may not be hostages, but they are certainly not safe. Fiesler does point out that Extraction One is important to the economy of Tradeport and that as well as a mining installation it is essentially a small town with a great many innocent people aboard.

The problems on Extraction One are continued on page 58.

THE WILDWOOD SITUATION

The Wildwood situation also seems innocuous at first. The consortium has received many reports of ‘something strange’ happening in the forests near one of Wildwood’s cities. Logging operations have been attacked, at least according to reports Fiesler has received. He thinks there may be some sort of revolt or insurgency brewing and wishes the Travellers to find out as much as they can. They might consider visiting under a cover story of sourcing supplies and materials for their ship, or some such.

Again, the Travellers might delegate this mission. If so, the expedition returns with no information about rebellion or unrest. However, there is an atmosphere of tension and even fear around the city of Entolere. Everyone seems to know someone who has seen ‘strange things’ moving in the forest. Logging camps have been abandoned after personnel went missing and tales of creatures that live in the forest are doing the rounds. Some of these appear to come from Old Earth, which intrigues the anthropologists among the crew.

Fiesler is sceptical about tales of a ‘wendigo’ or ‘arana-alska’ (a legendary local creature) killing the loggers but is concerned that something is going on for sure. Again, he asks the Travellers to find out and solve the problem. If that means hunting and killing something nasty in the forests, he has no problem with that.

THE TRADEPORT STORIES

There are multiple storylines revolving around the Travellers’ visit to Tradeport. The path through them is not linear. For example, the early part of *Those Other Imperials* (see page 54) will likely happen before the Travellers go (or send a delegation) to Grit or Wildwood. The next part of that storyline will develop whilst the Travellers are in port, with the violent finale of *Those Other Imperials* occurring some weeks after *Deepnight Revelation* begins her repairs.

The actions of the Travellers will dictate what happens when, so the Referee must weave the plot threads together to create a single narrative. By the end of it the Travellers will have dealt with an attempt to take their ship, discovered the existence of the Biologicals on Wildwood, resolved the situation on Grit and met Captain Clayton’s old commander aboard a Commonwealth aviation cruiser. The actual details will be the result of interaction between the Travellers and the Referee.

THOSE OTHER IMPERIALS

The Empire of Envais maintains an embassy of sorts at the orbital city. The Empire has taken over a section of one of the business/residential areas and largely cleared it of non-Imperial citizens by one means or another, typically by making life there unpleasant for the average resident but there are rumours of intimidation and even violence.

The 'embassy' resembles a large and utterly chaotic business district, with outsiders – and quite possibly those who live there – unable to keep track of who is in charge of what. Visitors are unwelcome, other than in zones around the periphery where business is done and cash milked from passing starfarers. 'Little Envais' has become a byword for sleaze and a rather relaxed attitude towards 'victimless' crimes, although anything that impacts the ability of the local businesses to make money is thoroughly stomped upon.

The embassy has its own dock – again, sort of. A rather crude docking facility was improvised some years ago without permission from Tradeport's owners and most Empire ships using Tradeport now dock directly at Little Envais. Those who avoid it typically belong to factions that do not get along with whoever is currently in control there. The present 'ambassador' is Earl Miklas Egrane, a minor player in the politics of Envais. Rumour has it that Earl Egrane is an exile, saved from complete destruction only by some of the other great nobles of the Empire on condition that he run Little Envais to their benefit.

The citizens of Little Envais are, for the most part, downtrodden and scared. They are kept in place by a cruel system of position and institutionalised bullying, with few rights and no legal protections. Those who interact with outsiders and make money off them are privileged and they know it. They tend to be arrogant towards those of lower status within the society of Little Envais and obsequious towards those above. Visitors are granted a perceived status based upon the amount of money they are likely to spend.

The Travellers will be invited to a personal meeting with Earl Egrane within moments of arriving at Tradeport. Anyone familiar with the situation can warn and advise them that he is a snake who will at best cheat them,

although of course the Travellers may be inclined to take the warning with a pinch of salt since it comes from Earl Egrane's rivals. A calculated analysis suggests that a meeting should not be dangerous the first couple of times, since the Earl is likely to think he can get what he wants by way of bargaining or winning the Travellers over.

Earl Egrane wants *Deepnight Revelation*. Not only is the ship a glorious thing in her own right but with it he would be king of the stars. Once he gets an idea of her firepower and other capabilities Egrane will only want her more. He will move cautiously at first but is impatient, arrogant and not very smart. Sooner or later Earl Egrane will start demanding 'his' ship and taking steps to get her. He has little idea about how TL15 military anti-hijack systems work and does not care; that ship is his but for the taking. From the moment she arrives, Earl Egrane's sole focus is on gaining possession of *Deepnight Revelation*.

A MEETING WITH THE EARL

Earl Egrane has a court, complete with a throne festooned with all manner of technological devices, so he can seem to be busy with the business of the empire whilst keeping guests waiting. The Travellers are too important for this gambit but nobody is so important they can be admitted whilst bearing arms. Guards can wait in an antechamber and ceremonial swords can be worn but firearms are strictly forbidden.

The court chamber is long, with armed guards stationed at each of the fake marble pillars. The overall décor is an oddly pleasing mix of neo-classical and early-starfaring Terran, with a lot of gilt and white marble. Courtiers stand in little conversation groups, pausing in their chatting to bow politely as the Travellers pass. Some quietly mention their names and areas of interest in the hope of being remembered.

The backdrop of suits, uniforms and gowns is not dissimilar to what the Travellers might have encountered back home if they attended an Imperial function. Nobles or high-ranking officers who interacted with them might actually feel quite homesick at the sight and the

manners of the court are not that different. The Empire of Envais is little more than a gang of warlords but they know how to put on a good show.

Rather than make the Travellers wait at the foot of his dais, Earl Egrane stands up from his throne and descends to meet them. This causes a bit of a stir, which astute Travellers might notice. He is a good-looking man of around 45, dressed in a fashionable suit with a sash, which bears a number of decorations presumably connected with his rank. The earl introduces himself and exchanges handshakes – again, this is obviously not his usual way of doing business – then invites the Travellers into his private chambers.

The private chambers are set with all manner of refreshments and sumptuously furnished. It is obvious the earl is putting on a show for the Travellers' benefit, suggesting he values their goodwill. He certainly acts like this is the case and will tolerate some minor breaches of etiquette – ostensibly because the Travellers are from a distant region and may not have the same customs. The fact is, Earl Egrane wants to put the Travellers off their guard and learn as much about them as possible.

Like Captain Clayton, Earl Egrane is willing to give away some information and even some minor assistance for free if it furthers his agenda. He knows the Travellers can get the same information elsewhere and without his slant on it, so is quite happy to chat about local affairs and the surrounding region. Egrane even admits that the Empire is a mess of rather nasty internal politics and hints that he is glad to be away from the capital and some of the more sordid affairs of state. Yes, he says if asked, some of the Empire's nobles use planetary raiding as a source of revenue. He does not admit that he is one of them.

Egrane wants to find out as much as he can before he commits to anything but his default pitch is that he, like the Travellers, is a little out of place at Tradeport and would like to build a mutually beneficial relationship. As the Travellers may have noticed, Tradeport is in decline. The consortium's leadership have been unable to turn things around and sooner or later the port will shut down or suffer a disaster. This will be very bad for the local worlds and everyone operating in the area. Thus it is in everyone's interests to bail out the sinking ship but there may be a point where it is necessary to push the captain overboard.

Egrane is willing to be quite open if he thinks the Travellers are receptive – according to him the Tradeport Consortium is making bad decision after bad decision and he can reverse the trend to everyone's benefit. He really does believe this and is convinced

the Travellers could make him master of Tradeport. Yesterday that would have been a lifetime ambition but for all the allure of his dream, Egrane is already becoming besotted with *Deepnight Revelation*. The Travellers may note how he hangs on every word they say about their ship. Any local leader would want to know about a powerful vessel like theirs but Egrane is taking it further.

Unless the Travellers offend Egrane beyond the limits of his temper, the meeting ends with a promise to send over whatever the Travellers need as soon as they let him know. They can work out a deal over time but if there is anything urgent the Travellers need they should just ask. All Egrane wants in return – he says – is that they remember his goodwill when major deals are being made.

Egrane's claim is not implausible; many merchant princes would be equally willing to assist with low-value items in the hope of building a relationship leading to a lucrative deal. However, in Egrane's case his motivation is different. He wants to give the Travellers something for nothing because (in his mind at least) they will then owe him something. Even if they do not ask for anything, Egrane will send a large shipment of luxury foodstuffs and minor gifts for the crew as a 'welcome and goodwill gesture'. Clayton or anyone else familiar with the Empire will decry the stupidity of accepting anything from Egrane – he will feel he has bought them now and that will come back to bite.

FURTHER INTERACTIONS WITH EARL EGRANE

Throughout their stay at Tradeport the Travellers will find themselves interacting with Earl Egrane. He will try to play it cool but is incapable of doing so and the Travellers will receive more goodwill packages along with requests for a 'state visit' to their ship or a 'personal meeting' aboard it. If the Travellers play along they will find Egrane a bit of a pain but he will think he is working towards his goal and be satisfied. If the Travellers snub him – as he sees it – then his attitude will quickly turn hostile.

Humouring Egrane is a relatively simple matter of letting him see parts of the ship, meeting with him and being seen with him but it is the latter that will cause problems elsewhere. The Empire is not well liked at Tradeport and if the Travellers seem to be too friendly with Egrane other factions will become wary of them. Pandering to Egrane's ego by being seen out and about with him or keeping his company at functions hosted elsewhere may stave off inevitable conflict with his forces but will gradually alienate other potential allies.

As relations cool, Egrane shows his true colours. Deals made apparently in good faith suddenly turn out to have strings attached or additional costs and Egrane's people start stalling over deliveries. Egrane himself starts springing awkward questions in the hope of embarrassing the Travellers in front of others and is increasingly bad-tempered with them for no good reason. The occasional show of force – or what passes for it – might also be mounted as a broad hint of Egrane's vast power and influence.

At some point, the Travellers will become aware of known raider ships entering dock at the embassy. These may include the two ships that attacked Naisar or others of similar ilk. The crews of these vessels are expected to maintain a façade of respectability in Tradeport as a whole but within the enclave controlled by the Empire they tend to swagger and boast about their attacks on helpless targets. This, along with the way the ordinary folk are treated when visitors are not around, says a lot about the true character of the Empire and its personnel.

Egrane will downplay all of this if asked about it and if the Travellers seem to accept his statements he will become only a little more paranoid towards them. However, if he is openly challenged he will move ever more rapidly towards hostility. Egrane will eventually call in the favours he has done for the Travellers – as he sees it – with a 'request' for action. He may not be aware that *Deepright Revelation* cannot jump (and it may be that she can, at the time the request is made) and in any case will be angered by a refusal.

Earl Egrane wants assistance in dealing with a 'problem client'. He pitches this as a request to convey him to a nearby star system aboard *Deepright Revelation* and provide him with 'suitable assistance'. He says he wants to negotiate an end to the reluctance of the local government to maintain its end of a long-standing deal. He thinks the presence of such an impressive craft will make the bargaining go more smoothly and might help avoid 'any unpleasantness' if the locals decide to get nasty. Of course, what Earl Egrane really wants is to extort tribute from a world his allies have raided in the past.

If the Travellers agree, Egrane arrives with a contingent of nearly 100 gunmen, only a handful of whom are wearing his uniform. He claims they are bodyguards but it should be obvious this is a raiding crew; only the actual bodyguards are in uniform and Egrane has no intention of setting foot planetside in person. If the Travellers go along with it, he gets the pleasure of demanding tribute from the bridge of *Deepright Revelation* then sending his gunmen planetside to collect the biggest crop of loot seen in these parts for years.

If the Travellers object, much depends on when they draw the line. A standoff on the dockside is one thing; suddenly growing a conscience when the raiders are loading their weapons in the hangar is another. The situation could get very nasty in the latter case and might lead to an attempt to take the ship. If this happens, see *Board and Storm!*. They may be able to back the gunmen down and disarm them, although a refusal at the dockside will be much easier to end without bloodshed. Egrane will not believe *Deepright Revelation* cannot jump unless she is obviously in a part-dismantled state and will not time his 'request' to coincide with such status; the Travellers will not be able to use that excuse even if it is true.

Board and Storm!

At some point Earl Egrane's patience will run out and he will make his move. He is aware of the awesome capabilities of *Deepright Revelation* but sees them as a prize rather than a threat. He is also used to getting what he wants by brute force and surprise, with his gunmen mowing down ill-equipped mid-tech locals. He has absolutely no idea what he is getting into, although that does not prevent him using at least a little deception.

If the Travellers have allowed raiders aboard before, Egrane will use this as a pretext for sending forces aboard, arranging another raid or 'negotiation', only this time his troops are ordered to capture the ship. If this option is not available Egrane will try to create some other pretext, such as sending men to 'protect his investment' since he has heard another faction is trying to steal critical components. He may even pretend he believes the Travellers are somehow about to betray him. He does not expect any of these ruses to completely succeed but the closer his men can get to the ship – ideally inside it – the greater the advantage they will have.

Egrane's plan is simple: get as close as possible, charge and gain control of the entrances, then force a passage through the ship to capture critical spaces such as the bridge and power plant. Any resistance is to be met with overwhelming firepower.

If the Travellers are caught completely off guard and have poor security arrangements in place there is an outside chance this could actually work. A more likely result is someone tripping an emergency alarm and the gunmen becoming trapped in a section of the ship. They may have hostages and could force crewmembers to open doors for them – they are completely ruthless and will rapidly become desperate – but the problem is more likely to be one of minimising casualties rather than preventing the ship from being captured.

If the Travellers take a cold, callous stance there is no real chance of being defeated here but they may have to sacrifice people they have voyaged with for years – and more importantly those people are important to other crewmembers. None of the additional crewmembers detailed in previous expansion books are critical to the overall storyline, so these identities can be used to personalise the losses or give a face to those at risk. Travellers willing to write off 13 hostages may be less keen to sacrifice someone who was the subject of an earlier adventure. By humanising the victims the Referee may be able to stop the Travellers treating the situation like a wargame and make them confront some hard decisions.

Providing the Travellers can get doors closed and break out weaponry from the armoury, the incursion will be easy enough to contain. After that it is a matter of negotiating the release of hostages or rescuing them, which may require some creative thinking. The details will depend on how well the initial assault went – it may be that the attackers never get any closer than the Tradeport docking bay.

Dealing with Egrane

The Travellers are now in open conflict with Earl Egrane and by inference possibly with the Empire of Envais. The Tradeport authorities will not help either side, as they do not want to deal with the fallout. They will object to large numbers of heavily armed personnel moving through inhabited parts of the orbital city but if either side is discreet they will encounter no active resistance from the other factions at Tradeport.

If the Travellers attack Egrane directly he will fight to the last drop of other people's blood. He is quite willing to use civilians as human shields and will retreat into little-known quarters of this 'embassy' to draw in the Travellers' forces. Snipers and ambushes will wear them down, making coming after him costly. This is not the first time Egrane has employed this strategy and the Travellers will need to ask themselves if the cost of taking him out might be too high.

There is another consideration. The Empire of Envais is not interested in minor conflicts between their nobles and whoever they have picked a fight with this

week but openly attacking a place like the embassy is tantamount to making war. This is a war the Travellers can win; their ship outguns the entire Empire. However, such a conflict could be inconvenient and might lead to other problems.

There are ways to deal with Egrane without making a head-on attack. The simplest is to do nothing; Egrane has shown his hand and failed. Another attack is unlikely and with a few sensible security measures there is no chance it would succeed. The Travellers simply do not need to win this fight but if they desire it the Empire itself will provide the means. A noble who shows weakness will be set upon by others; one that causes conflict that is bad for the Empire as a whole might as well sign his own death warrant. All the Travellers need do is harm the Empire's interests at Tradeport just enough that other nobles feel the need to rectify the situation and Egrane will be dead within the year.

The Travellers might go about this by destroying assets such as raider ships using the embassy or the dock itself. The latter would produce a stern statement of disapproval from Fiesler but he would actually be quite pleased. He has resented and felt threatened – rightly – by the Empire having its own dock at the orbital city. Disabling it would do the Tradeport Consortium a favour, getting rid of the problem without any comeback on Fiesler and his counterparts.

The Travellers are entirely capable of landing an assault force on the dock, setting charges and chasing off any resistance that may materialise. This is exactly the right sort of statement to make – a limited but robust retaliation that makes it clear the Travellers will not tolerate attacks on their personnel without being so extravagant as to require a response. If the Travellers implement this sort of measure, they will have the pleasure of seeing Egrane's power crumble as those he has previously intimidated begin to stand up to him. Crooked, one-sided deals are terminated and before long it is him begging for a deal on any terms. Mercenaries desert his service, ships take their business elsewhere and one day Egrane is assassinated. He may be replaced internally within his own faction or by someone sent to take over by the Empire but either way the Travellers will have dealt him a death-blow.

CRAWLING, CRAWLING

Extraction One is by far the most important economic resource on Grit. It is also one of the largest settlements on the planet. Its journeys across the desert are generally aimed from one settlement to the next, arriving in the area after weeks or months of slow progress that leaves a trail of what would be devastation anywhere else. On Grit it is just a gouge in the worthless desert surface, filled in over the next few months by wind-blown dust. During a transit, pulverised rock and desert grit are sifted for useful minerals that are then purified and passed to storage hoppers in the belly of the crawler.

The best and most valuable materials are forged into ingots, which are shipped out aboard small starships, but bulk materials must be deposited at a settlement. Freighters from Tradeport pick up stacks of ingots or mineral gravel and payment is made in the form of electronic credit drawn on Tradeport's economy. This is the heart of the current problems; not only does the Tradeport Consortium pay less than a free market would provide, it also overcharges for anything the population wants or needs. Some money is made from independent traders passing by but bulk minerals are not valuable enough to provide a good income when clients are small-ship operators. Thus the situation on Grit is one of miners in debt to the company store for their tools, writ very large.

One result of the situation is that maintenance is skimped unless absolutely necessary and often even then. This can only go on so long before a tragedy occurs and the first of those happened a few months ago. There have been minor incidents since but it is the environmental systems collapse in District C-8 that everyone talks about. The C districts are almost entirely residential, with a population of 3–4,000 each. Almost half the citizens of C-8 perished when its ventilation system catastrophically failed, allowing the unbreathable outside atmosphere into the crawler. The area has been evacuated and remains sealed off but it is only a matter of time before another disaster occurs.

The general mood is one of simmering outrage at the exploitation of the populace in this manner, leading to numerous incidents of thievery from starfarers or their ships and fights in the bars of Extraction One. Some time ago the locals came up with a way to turn this to their advantage, implementing a distinctly biased system of penalties for the guilty party – which always seemed to be offworlders. Heavy fines brought in some much-needed funds and for a time the situation stabilised. However, a new incident occurred over the urgent need for spares and replacement parts.



The administrators of Extraction One made representations to Tradeport for an urgent shipment of spares and equipment. Their case was good and well made. Tradeport agreed, or at least made a reply that sounded like they agreed, that items necessary to the repair of Extraction One and the well-being of its inhabitants would be shipped to the crawler as a matter of urgency. This would be written off as an operating expense.

The reply sounded like Extraction One was getting what it needed at last, and at no cost, but what arrived was not what had been promised. There were no life support spares or 'unnecessary' equipment, just the minimum of spares and replacement components for the money-making parts of the crawler. The bill arrived on the next ship, after repair work had begun.

The current situation on Extraction One is becoming serious. People have been evacuated from some of the C levels and their life support equipment cannibalised to keep the overcrowded remaining residential districts operational. The ore extraction and processing gear is working better than it has for some years, which should increase productivity and allow Extraction One to buy everything it needs. This is the line taken by the Tradeport Consortium but the locals are not receptive.

Just before the Travellers leave for Grit, the leaders there decide to shut down all supplies of materials to Tradeport. Extraction One continues to extract and refine ore but the installation is effectively on strike. This decision is controversial to say the least and the population has become bitterly divided. By the time the Travellers enter orbit over Grit the first brawls have taken place. Nobody is using words like 'rioting' or 'civil war' yet but the situation is headed that way.

If the Travellers have lost crewmembers on Grit as a result of sending a delegation, they are safe and well but in custody. The local authorities intended to demand the usual steep reparations but an internal disagreement paralysed the administration whilst the hardliners harassed the Travellers' delegation. The leaders of Extraction One do not mean the crewmembers any harm but are unsure what to do for the best now they have been held for so long.

ARRIVING AT EXTRACTION ONE

Upon arrival at Extraction One, the Travellers will feel distinctly unwelcome. The crawler has a couple of starship-grade missile launchers for self-defence and

a tracking system to support them, although how well these weapons work is an open question. The Travellers are warned there are missiles locked onto their craft and that they are denied permission to land. Another transmission comes in moments later, saying the Travellers are cleared for landing on the upper deck, followed by a dire warning to sheer off and stay away. It is clear the situation is complicated.

Finally, the Travellers get a clear answer. The missile lock is disengaged and they receive clearance to land. This is accompanied by a personal guarantee – made by one Sian Cornvallis – that the Travellers' ship will be safe. A quick check of the records shows that Cornvallis is the Logistics Manager of the crawler, a senior official in what passes for a government at Extraction One but she is not someone who would normally speak for the whole population. Her holographic image, assuming it has not been doctored, shows a weary-looking middle-aged woman in a rumpled garment not unlike the shipboard uniforms used aboard *Deepnight Revelation*. She has a standard-issue security belt at her waist, complete with handgun and spare ammunition.

Cornvallis will explain as best she can. There has been a breakdown of society aboard Crawler One and what she describes as a major difference of opinion over what to do regarding the situation with Tradeport. She has arrested both the major factions' leaders and any members of the government who disagreed with her actions and is now in charge. Whether this was decisive and necessary action, mutiny or a coup is immaterial at this point. The situation is getting out of hand and she wants to negotiate a solution.

Cornvallis will meet with the Travellers readily enough but she is not willing to put herself in their power. She will not come aboard a starship but is willing to meet outside if the Travellers are of a similar mindset. It is hard to be diplomatic whilst wearing an air mask but an outdoor meeting is probably the simplest option. The Travellers will notice that Cornvallis has several armed people with her or nearby. Some are clearly security personnel, others seem to be civilians who have been given weapons. The majority seem nervous.

THE RELUCTANT REVOLUTIONARIES

If Extraction One has crewmembers in custody, Cornvallis will offer assurances they are safe and well, and readily agrees to return them as soon as possible. By that she means as soon as she is sure of the Travellers' intentions; for all she knows the captives may

be the only reason she has not been gunned down on sight. She offers an explanation of what is going on and the opportunity to resolve it peacefully.

Cornvallis, by her own admission, is a moderate radical... or maybe a radical moderate. Or something similar. She and others in the administration were alarmed at the situation like everyone else but did not polarise into one of the two factions. One group wanted to take a hard line with the Tradeport Consortium, to the point of threatening to kill captives – she does not know how seriously this was intended – and cutting off mineral and ore shipments until they got a better deal. There was even talk of independence. The other faction wanted an end to the dispute, feeling that (as Cornvallis puts it) the crumbs thrown to them were better than the disaster independence would cause.

It was not lost on Cornvallis that those who wanted to go back to the old state of affairs tended to be the better-off or more powerful citizens, whilst those feeling the worst effects were the most radical. Cornvallis and her friends could see no future in either stance, so attempted to cut through the whole mess. They are now in charge of the crawler and beginning to discover that there are no better answers to be had. She tries not to show it but Cornvallis is deeply afraid for everyone aboard Extraction One.

If the Travellers are willing to negotiate or have any workable ideas, Cornvallis will gladly hear them. She is not a very good revolutionary, nor are her supporters, and they will quickly forget that helpful Travellers are potential enemies. Crewmembers will be released in return for token concessions despite Cornvallis having nothing else to bargain with. She is very well aware that Tradeport can manage without its main source of mineral imports for a lot longer than Extraction One can survive without Tradeport but simply has no good ideas.

The Travellers could take control of Extraction One from Cornvallis and her people without much difficulty. They have only a few weapons and no real idea how to use them. Even the security people have little combat training – there is not much call for firearms aboard Extraction One and no real opportunity to train with them. More importantly Cornvallis and her people are complacent and a bit too trusting. There would be bloodshed but it would not be much of a fight.

If the Travellers go down this route, so be it. They will be in control of the crawler when the next problem arises and will have to deal with it on their own. If they are unwilling to use force, the Travellers might come up

with another solution. One option is to strike a bargain with Fiesler on behalf of Extraction One – the miners have little to bargain with but the Travellers certainly do. There is the question of whether Fiesler will honour the deal once the Travellers have moved on, of course. He is more honourable than some local businessmen but still a rapacious son of Tradeport.

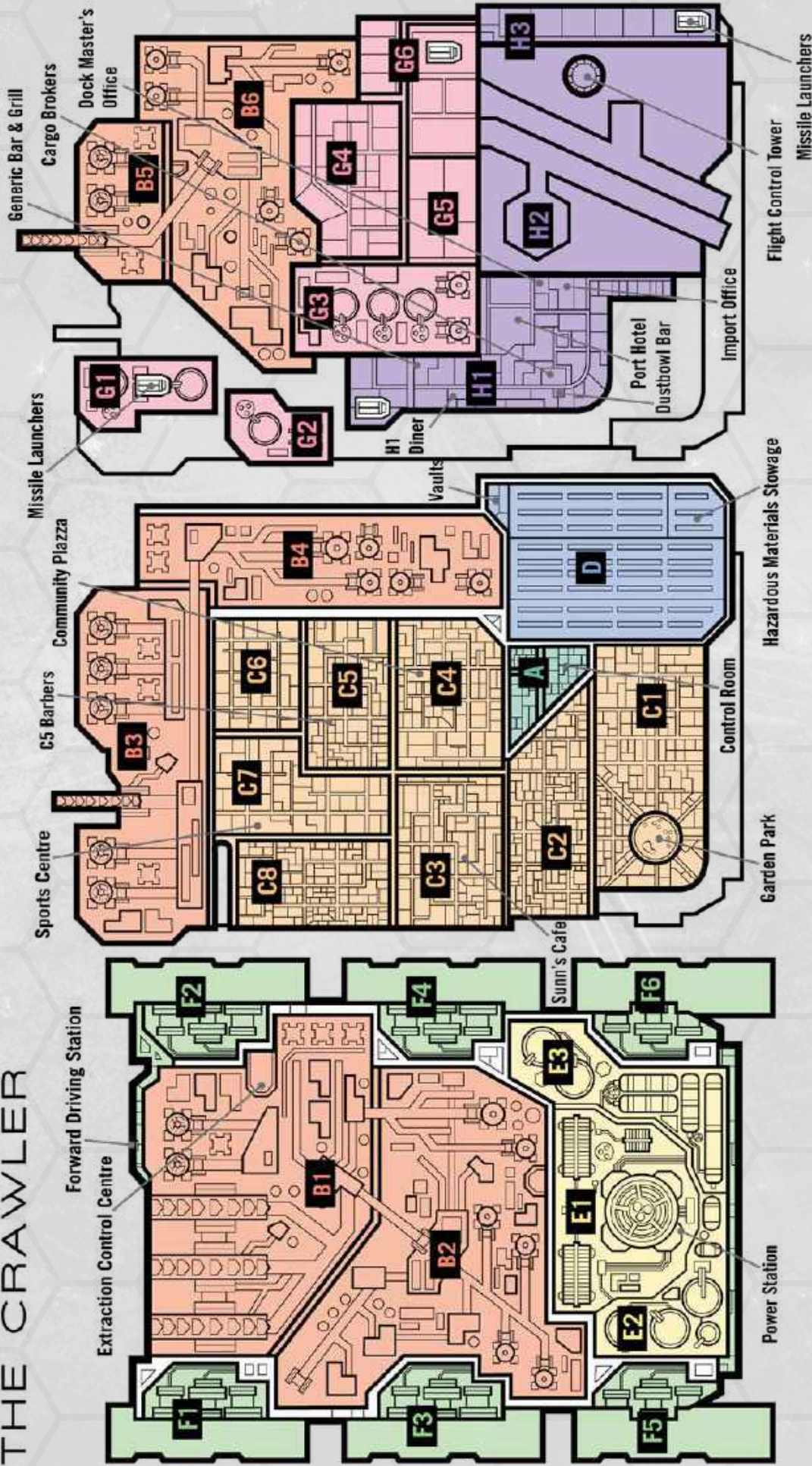
Another alternative would be to give Extraction One something to bargain with. That might mean providing Cornvallis with something Fiesler wants but cannot take from her or giving the locals the means to buy what they need. Perhaps the simplest solution is for the Travellers to transfer some of their line of credit to Cornvallis and to advise her to spend it – and take delivery of what she has bought – before they leave the area. This would not please Fiesler all that much but he can be talked around. After all, he asked the Travellers to solve the problem at Grit and they have found a solution that puts the crawler back into full production without anyone having to back down or lose face. Fiesler would accept such a solution – grudgingly perhaps – as the best outcome that could be expected.

A DEVELOPMENT

Before any solution can be put in place, however, there is another development. The crawler shudders and begins to roll to a stop. Despite its slow speed its stopping distance is still measured in hundreds of metres. It would be less if the sifters or gougers were engaged but they have been lifted clear of the surface. Cornvallis and her people can tell the Travellers it does not feel like the brakes have been applied; the crawler has simply disengaged its drive. The ore sifters have also been shut down or lost power. The faint vibration they normally send through the whole structure of Extraction One is eerily absent.

Something is clearly wrong. If negotiations have been going well, Cornvallis will completely forget the Travellers might be her enemies and include them in her first response. This begins with a rush to the main control room, situated two decks down in the middle of the governmental and administrative complex. The control room is not a driving chamber for a vehicle; it is more like the bridge of a starship or command centre for a starport's docking area. Surrounded by offices and briefing rooms, the heart of Extraction One contains innocuous looking consoles that can display ore output or control the gigantic steering machinery. Extraction One is not driven; it is directed using waypoints on a map. The Travellers may find something a little disappointing about that.

THE CRAWLER



District A

Governmental & Administrative Complex
Including: Data Storage, Control Room,
Science & Medical Facilities, Briefing
Halls & Meeting Rooms.

District E

Power & Utilities Complex
Including: Waste Processing,
Fuel Tanks & Water Reservoirs.

District B

Extraction & Processing Facilities
Including: Drills, Cranes,
Prospecting & Sampling Facilities,
Worker Welfare Facilities.

District F

Drive Machinery
Including: Steering Linkages,
Engines & Control Pathways.

District C

Residential Facilities
Including: Communal Spaces
& Recreational Facilities.

District G

Industrial & Refinement Facilities
Including: Light Industrial Units,
Workshops & Storage.

District D

Storage Complex
Including: Hazardous Materials
Storage & Vaults

District H

Space Port Complex Including:
Landing Pad, Flight Control Tower,
Recreational Facilities, Cargo Facilities
& Traveller Services.

The reason for the halt is apparent by the time Cornwallis and the Travellers reach the control chamber. An ultimatum has been received from Eduar Rodatre, a mid-level engineer who Cornwallis has up to now considered a friend and ally. Rodatre informs the Travellers and anyone else listening that he now controls all critical functions of the crawler and is taking control. Cornwallis and her supporters are to assemble on the landing deck within 30 minutes and turn over all weapons. Offworlders will negotiate with Rodatre now or more accurately they will meet with him to hear his terms. Prisoners of Cornwallis' faction will be released into his custody.

Rodatre has nothing more to bargain with than any of the other factions but he has gone over to the hard-line group. Travellers with experience of such things may detect a hint of desperate fanaticism absent from Cornwallis and a quick analysis of the situation yields two disturbing facts. It does not appear that Rodatre has planned beyond taking control of Extraction One, which is bad enough. He is also using the language of the fanatic and there is something distinctly sinister about wanting Cornwallis and her people unarmed and in the open where they could be easily shot and dumped over the side.

If the Travellers go along with what Rodatre wants, he will do exactly this, organising an impromptu firing squad and throwing the bodies off the landing deck. Interference will be met with violence – Rodatre and his people have no thought to the consequences of shooting offworlders along with their own rivals. They are not bad people, or were not a few weeks ago, but they are desperate and headed down a road that can only lead to escalation.

Rodatre's bargaining point, at least in terms of getting control of Extraction One, is his control of power to the motors and to every district of the crawler. He cannot directly control the life support system or vent a compartment to allow the outside atmosphere in but the Travellers will not know that. What he can do is turn the power off and leave everyone in a compartment to die in the dark. He lost his own family in the disaster at C-8, and is not thinking like a normal person.

RODATRE

Eduar Rodatre can be negotiated with, although this is more a hostage situation than a business deal. He is now a hard-line Tradeport-hater and that hatred extends indiscriminately to all starfarers. He has seen his people downtrodden, cheated and exploited until it killed them, so will not trust the word of an outsider. However, he

does know that taking control of the crawler is not the end of the matter. He had to do something, so he did what he could and hoped that somehow a solution would present itself.

If the Travellers choose to make a deal with Rodatre, they will not be able to prevent the murder of his enemies and people he thinks might oppose him. He is not interested in right or wrong at this point, just doing what he thinks needs to be done to prevent someone else agreeing to go back under the thumb of Tradeport. Some of his subordinates are in a more rational mindset and might be persuaded to remove him from power but there will still be a lot of bloodshed.

Rodatre or his subordinates would accept a deal whereby the problem of spares, repairs and reparations were solved but an agreement means nothing to them. They need to see it actually happen. Once the crawler is fully repaired and restocked to a level where C-8 cannot happen again, Rodatre will be in a position to relax his dictatorial grip on the crawler's population. Whether he will or not, or if he will be assassinated before that, depends on a great many factors. Society will be riven for many years to come, assuming the crawler survives the disaster Rodatre has inadvertently unleashed.

Rodatre has taken control of the one place on the crawler that gives him control over the whole power network. Normally, it would not be possible to cut power to an area without getting past a great many safety and security checks but the designers envisaged an emergency situation where an operator might need to divert power or reduce load. The controls to do this were fitted in the forward driving station, an innocuously-titled chamber low down on the front face of the crawler.

The station was fitted and made operational but has never been used; most people have forgotten about it. However, it is designed to allow the crawler to be manually directed in an emergency and has a power-management system that allows areas to be cut out of the grid to reduce load or increase available power for movement. This does not increase the speed of the crawler but allows it to drag itself over very soft ground or out of a depression that might otherwise trap it.

Rodatre has cut power to the drive mechanism and the extraction/processing equipment to make his point but what he did not realise is that the system was never properly tested. It has not been used nor needed until now, so its critical fault has gone unnoticed. The power has been cut but it will not come back on without a complete reset of the system. As yet, nobody knows this.

The crawler was in an area of loose ground when the power was cut and has begun to sink into the surface. The process is very slow but already there is a very slight tilt to the deck as the starboard side has sunk a few millimetres lower than the port tracks. In time the list will become very noticeable and more importantly the crawler will have difficulty getting moving again if it remains in place for too long. The worst-case scenario would see Extraction One trapped and immobilised, making it economically worthless. Abandonment by Tradeport is likely at that point and what would happen to the inhabitants is an open question. If Rodatre is made aware of the situation he merely uses it as a bargaining point, refusing to admit that his course of action will result in everyone losing – assuming of course that he cares about that.

It would take a truly miraculous piece of negotiation to get Rodatre to surrender control of the power system. If he does not, the emergency override will keep the drive offline indefinitely. It can only be disengaged from the forward driving station. Rodatre will only turn off power to residential areas in the utmost emergency, although he might do it in revenge for a particularly vicious attack. He is quite willing to shut down other areas of the crawler, such as the main control systems and ore-handling bays. Indeed, he has already begun shutting down some areas – after giving a warning to personnel to get out – in order to create a barrier between the area he controls and Cornvallis' people 'up top'.

RESOLVING THE GRIT SITUATION

The situation is a difficult one. The longer the crawler remains static, the less likely it is ever to move again. The only controls that can free it are held by a desperate fanatic who does not want to bargain with offworlders and does not know what he wants from them even if he was made to. The Travellers might, just possibly, be able to come to an arrangement with Rodatre but their time is limited and they may have to resort to more direct methods.

Gaining access to the forward driving station would normally mean negotiating darkened decks in which the air is already going bad and fighting with Rodatre's supporters wherever they have established themselves. There is another way, however. The inhabitants of the crawler rarely go outside – as far as most of them are concerned, social spaces in their home deck are 'outside'; there is nothing of importance on the exterior hull of the crawler, so traversing the outside of the hull or rappelling down from the front of the landing deck would catch Rodatre by surprise. There are hatches

close to the station, at least according to blueprints. It might be possible to smash through the front windows but they are heavily armoured to protect the emergency crew from whatever hazards a giant mining crawler might encounter in its career.

Getting into position undetected is not that difficult. The Referee might ask for STR and DEX checks to negotiate the outer hull but with proper preparation there is no undue hazard. Similarly, hatches are electronically locked but Rodatre is unlikely to have changed the codes. He will become aware of the intrusion sooner or later but might not initially recognise the alarm triggered by opening a hatch. Response will thus be slow.

If the Travellers blow in the front windows and swing in, they let the external atmosphere into the station. Rodatre and his people will have to scramble for emergency masks, which might give the Travellers time to subdue or disable them without killing. Likewise, the Travellers might be able to quietly take down guards or a patrol sent to investigate an open hatch and still achieve surprise when they reach the control room.

Rodatre has a handful of his most loyal supporters with him in the station. They are armed with security weapons – handguns, shotguns and a couple of submachineguns – and will fight if attacked (see page 96). If caught by surprise some or all of them might be convinced not to reach for weapons and Rodatre himself might be taken alive. Such is the fever-pitch of paranoia aboard Extraction One that Rodatre's people will fight to the death if attacked, since they expect to be killed out of hand. A standoff is thus a highly charged situation in which the trigger for a massacre might be almost any sudden movement.

If Rodatre and/or most of his people are taken alive, both they and Cornvallis will be enormously surprised. Everyone was expecting a bloodbath, yet the Travellers have managed to avert one but the fact that they managed this is less surprising than the fact that they wanted to. Such an outcome creates a moment where almost anything could happen. The deep divisions in society will take time to heal but the Travellers might actually create peace and goodwill on Extraction One – even if they have to ram it down everyone's throats.

On the other hand, eliminating Rodatre and his people does solve that end of the problem. Reconciliation is unlikely and something will have to be done about the fact that some of the population hate members of other factions. It is likely there will be violence and certainly discord for years to come and Extraction One will not be a happy place unless some of the population are

convinced to take their grievances and live elsewhere. That is a problem the Travellers could solve if they wanted to but it is far beyond their remit.

Once the forward driving station is under control, one way or another, power can be restored to the drive and extraction machinery. Unfortunately, it does not come back on. This is a scary moment, in which harsh words could undo much of the good that has been done so far but a thorough examination of the power system suggests that a full reset from the main power plant control chamber will fix the problem.

With power back on, Extraction One strains to start moving again. There are ominous lurches and the feeling of a gigantic track slipping on soft ground, then slowly the crawler begins to advance once more. The mood aboard will be sullen if there was a lot of

bloodshed but if the Travellers somehow resolved the standoff without a lot of deaths it is instead a moment of shared triumph. The hull vibrates, not with the sound of ore extraction equipment but with joyful citizens cheering and stamping their feet in delight. The moment will pass but it will be remembered as a time when starfarers came not to cheat and steal but to help despite not being obliged to.

The relationship with Tradeport must still be resolved but the Travellers have many options as discussed before. Their task from Fiesler was to find out why Extraction One was not delivering as much as it used to and resolve the problem if possible. If the Travellers can go back to him with a solution that does not cost too much Fiesler can be bargained into accepting it. Beyond that, the fate of the people of Grit is in their own hands.



SOUNDS OF THE WILDWOODS

Wildwood has a small but reasonably well-equipped downport located at the city of David's Landing. It is not a passenger terminal by any stretch of the imagination; Wildwood exports agricultural produce and timber, bulk items requiring a heavy-duty loading system, and receives few passengers, if any. Its port is characterised by large container-loading machines, conveyor belts running to specialist cargo loading facilities and very little in the way of creature comforts.

David's Landing is an important economic centre but is in no way a planetary capital. Cities and larger settlements are generally self-governing, with little interaction beyond trade. A web of rail links allows easy – if not frequent – contact between the cities. Most trains are heavy goods transports but 'trade trains' also make their way from city-to-city. The arrival of one floods local markets with goods from elsewhere, sometimes politely offered by sober merchant factors but commonly hawked by noisy entrepreneurs.

The port at David's Landing is not busy. Every couple of weeks a large freighter comes in from Tradeport and takes on a bulk cargo. The rest of the time the pads are occupied by one or two small traders, with stacks of logs building up and warehouses filling with agricultural goods. The port has a number of secondary industries – carpentry and woodworking businesses, breweries and a ration-packing plant for the starship market – which employ a significant proportion of the city's population.

David's Landing has not been troubled by the occurrences reported elsewhere; only production from the city of Entolere has been interrupted. Deliveries are coming in from the other cities by rail and local opinion is that there is nothing of consequence going on. Asking about the wendigo, arana-alska or other supernatural woodland creatures will cost the Travellers a few drinks and yield little more than the usual folk tales. Every culture has stories about bad things hiding in remote places, preying on unwary souls who venture there. Tales told in David's Landing are obviously traditional scare-stories, whose villains range from witches to ancient sleeping gods. There is no underlying link to any of it and nothing useful can be learned at David's Landing.

Entolere lies some 400 kilometres away, at the far end of a heavy-duty rail link. It has a small landing field so the Travellers could hop there in a small ship or land directly without going to the capital. The trade trains carry passengers, sometimes in ostentatious luxury and always at an inflated price. Alternatively, the Travellers might ride in the personnel compartment of a goods train. This is not a comfortable ride but will not be hazardous. However they get to Entolere, the Travellers find it subdued and a little dismal.

ENTOLERE

Entolere is a farming and logging settlement that gradually grew into a small city. In some ways it is rather pleasant, built with TL8 applications of natural wood and fibres. It is surrounded by farmland interspersed with areas of light woodland, with an extensive forest outside the farmed zone. The last 30 kilometres of the rail link to David's Landing runs through dense woodland that has to be aggressively cleared back from the line and to the west lies an enormous virgin forest.

Wildwood has an official Law Level 5, which in this case means rifles and shotguns are freely available as work tools and concealable weapons such as handguns are restricted. In reality this does not mean much; anyone who can demonstrate a need for personal defence can obtain a personal weapon license from local officials. Citizens, merchants and anyone who might have a need for self-defence is likely to be issued a license and handguns carried by offworlders will probably not attract a second glance. Military weapons and automatic firearms are forbidden other than for the use of the city militia and will not be permitted through starport or landing-field security stations. There is little attempt made to search anything brought in, however, so guns are easy to smuggle into Entolere.

The city is subdued. There are around 25,000 people living in Entolere but activity is surprisingly low for the size of population. There is an atmosphere of apprehension in the city and here and there groups of citizens wearing militia armbands are carrying out target practice or half-heartedly constructing wooden barricades to block the main approaches to the town.

Asking around, the Travellers soon find there is only one topic of conversation in Entolere; the loss of the logging camp.

The logging camp does not have an official name; it is just 'the logging camp'. It is run by an unofficial group of small local businesses who cooperate for the purposes of collective bargaining and is connected to the city by 10 kilometres of railway line running through the thick forest. This line is not connected to the main line running to other cities but terminates at a handling yard close to the main line.

Starting around four or five months ago, workers at the logging camp reported sighting strange creatures in the forest. Attempts to get pictures or identify the creatures came to naught and at first it was assumed that – at worst – someone had turned an offworld creature loose or one had escaped. However, disappearances were reported starting three months ago, with search parties never finding anything. Workers became reluctant to enter the forest and work slowed to a crawl. A lull in sightings was almost certainly connected to the fact that nobody was going out of sight of the camp and every time an attempt was made to restart production someone went missing.

A major effort to find the culprits drew in militia from the city, who crashed ham-fistedly around the forests searching as best they could. No evidence was found of any foul play but there were casualties due to accidents and a very unfortunate friendly fire incident resulting from jittery townsfolk blundering into one another in the forest. The militia was withdrawn and patrols were attempted instead. These involved the most experienced woodsmen and a few volunteers with relevant investigative or military experience. The patrols found nothing at first, then stopped coming back.

Most of the loggers drifted back to the city, scared to be in the forest, leaving just a few hardy souls or those determined to find friends or colleagues. These hung on in the camp until about three weeks ago when they suddenly stopped responding to radio calls. A train carrying a group of well-armed volunteers pushed up the line to a point about two kilometres short of the camp, where it encountered fallen trees on the track. Whilst trying to clear the blockage, some of the volunteers simply vanished whilst no-one was looking. Others started firing wildly into the trees, later claiming they saw some huge creature shoving its way through the lower branches. At this point the train started moving backwards and anyone who did not scramble immediately aboard was not heard from again... with one exception.

This exception was Millard Stevin, a 17-year-old trainee railway engineer whose father and brother had been workers at the logging camp and were now missing. Stevin volunteered for the expedition back to the camp and was left behind when the train left. He returned to town three days later, rambling about a walking tree ripping up the railway line and being chased by a 'big plant-man-thing' for several kilometres. He does not appear to be insane but is certainly in a state of shock and confusion.

The city's administrators have repeatedly asked for help from the starport and other cities but all that has come back is polite acknowledgement of 'the situation' and requests for clarification and evidence. The nearest thing to a promise of assistance was a statement that David's Landing could not spare any personnel without evidence an intervention was necessary, which amounts to meaningless waffle intended to bounce the ball back into Entolere's court.

THE TRAVELLERS' EXPEDITION

When the Travellers arrive, they may be surprised at just how many people come to greet them, absolutely delighted they have arrived. The locals think the Travellers have come from David's Landing to help with their problem, which is sort of true. There is no need to ask around for information; everyone has a version of the story to tell – some with quite lurid embellishments. Regarding legends of strange creatures, the most common tales are of the wendigo, a supernatural being from Old Earth that could turn a human into a cannibalistic monster, and the arana-alska, a local monster of legend that stalked the forests feeding off the unwary.

There are many variations on this tale, along with all sorts of ideas about what has happened at the logging camp. Perhaps some of the workers were possessed by the wendigo and turned on their fellows; perhaps the arana-alska has tumbled trees onto the railway track and cut off the camp so it can punish intruders into its domain. Nobody knows for sure but as usual there are plenty of people who know someone who saw the monster, for sure. What is definite is that nobody is willing to go back into the forest. None of the loggers have come out and only that kid Stevin went into the woods and returned. Such is the fear in the city that Stevin is now viewed with suspicion by many of the cityfolk.

The city administration want the Travellers to investigate the camp and see what really happened. Most are unwilling to say out loud that they think a supernatural

creature dwells in the forest but are scared enough to acknowledge the possibility. The unspoken dread is 'what if it comes here?' – the only contact Entolere has with the outside world comes in by air or up the rail line through the forest.

Of the administrators, only Agata Venelle (see page 96) is willing to accompany an expedition. She is young and ambitious and has managed to convince herself she has a career-making opportunity here rather than a life-threatening situation. She can arrange for a locomotive and a couple of logging wagons to transport the Travellers but they need a driver. Fortunately, Stevin is willing to go. His motivation is to find his father and brother but, being young, he also dreams of confronting whatever chased him through the forest and riddling it with buckshot.

If the Travellers try very hard they might manage to get some militiamen or former loggers to go with them, who are used to working in the forest but are now very scared of it. Something has changed and the previously neutral countryside is somehow hostile. Morale among the volunteers is fragile and they are likely to refuse to go off into the woods. They will, however, secure the train or the camp without complaint.

Once the Travellers are ready they can head up the line. All is well for about eight kilometres, until the locomotive is forced to stop. Several trees have been felled onto the tracks, blocking them. It will be necessary to dismount from the train to inspect the obstruction, which means moving within a narrow area of sunlight between the walls of the forest. Closer inspection reveals the trees have not been cut down; they have been pushed over as if by a heavy vehicle. This has torn up the ground where roots have come free and if the Travellers choose to look closely they will see that the ground under the tracks has also been loosened. If the trees were cleared it would be possible to proceed but the train would have to cross the loose area slowly and carefully or risk derailment.

Clearing the logs will take longer than the remaining daylight, even if additional workers or militiamen were brought along. If not, the Travellers will need to use extreme measures or spend a whole day – perhaps more – forcing a passage. Any militia with the Travellers will agree to start clearing the tracks, running the train home for the night and starting again tomorrow. They will not proceed up the tracks on foot, although Stevin and Venelle are willing to make the effort.

It is likely that the Travellers will make the final approach to the logging camp on foot, through a distinctly creepy forest which is oddly quiet at times.

The Travellers come into sight of the camp with about 4 hours of daylight left, and the impression that someone was watching them as they marched up the tracks. Advanced sensors will not pick up anything except the usual small forest creatures and birds however, and there are no signs of human activity.

THE LOGGING CAMP

The logging camp is a typical example of a temporary setup that became permanent. It is constructed mainly of wooden buildings, some of them partially rebuilt with TL8 materials. There are power cables strung overhead in a manner that will make safety-conscious engineers wince, and machinery built into wooden frames arranged in a haphazard manner all across the camp.

There has clearly been a fight here. A couple of the buildings have suffered some fire damage and there are bullet holes in many surfaces. Shotgun shells and rifle cartridges can be found almost anywhere, though not in any great concentration, as if a running fight took place or a piecemeal defence was overrun. It appears that some defences were set up using the plentiful logs, but they are not well organised – essentially people with no military experience built what amounts to a fence rather than providing themselves with firing positions. There is no sign of any of the workers, nor any bodies. Here and there a rifle or shotgun can be found, sometimes with bloodstains on surfaces nearby, but every single body or survivor has been removed.

The Travellers will likely not have encountered the Biologicals yet, so they cannot know what happened here. They will be able to figure out the camp was attacked and all people – living and dead – removed, but that is as much as they can tell. In fact this is exactly what happened; a force of ambulators moved into position around the camp, then a heavy lifter advanced out of the forest and smashed through the fence. It knocked over a couple of huts to get at workers hiding inside – the Travellers will find the evidence of that and may wonder just what could do it – whilst the ambulators entered the camp from other directions. The defence collapsed in moments, turning into a series of running fights as the defenders tried to get somewhere they could make a stand. Afterward, all the bodies were removed for study. There were no survivors.

The Biologicals then withdrew, leaving a trail that can be followed if the Travellers are willing to search carefully. The Biologicals' thought processes are such that they did not trouble themselves to cover their tracks – they did what they intended at the camp and moved back to their home area. The idea that someone might follow

them did occur but was not given the level of thought that a security-conscious human might expect. That does not mean they did not prepare for the eventuality.

ON THE TRAIL

The Travellers have a few hours of daylight left. If they are so inclined they could retreat for the night or hole up in the camp. The former means a long walk back to the train and a repeat the following day, whereas the latter implies a nervous night in a camp where the previous inhabitants have been killed or kidnapped. The Biologicals will not trouble the Travellers but there are all the sounds and disturbances of a forest at night to make them jumpy.

The trail runs through thick forest, with the sky barely visible under the canopy. Light is reasonably good, once the Travellers get used to the conditions, but the trail of the Biologicals is not a broad path; it is a trail left by a large creature crunching through lower branches and kicking small obstacles aside. It is, in short, slow going and rather tiring. For all their assertions the Travellers will keep a razor-sharp watch, it is easy for them to start concentrating on the next obstacle ahead rather than looking for ambushes.

A Difficult (10+) Recon or Survival check will alert the Travellers that something is not quite right. The vegetation in the area they are passing through has a different shading, leaves are just not aligned the way that would be expected or may be the wrong shape... something is wrong. In fact, the Travellers have entered an area controlled by a Biologicals braincase. If they are thus forewarned the Travellers will have time to start looking around before the local vegetation attacks them.

Forewarned Travellers will note that some of the local vegetation is moving unnaturally. What appear to be seed pods are slowly twisting to point in the direction of the Travellers. The pods do not belong to the plant species they are attached to – this is unlikely to be noticed other than by experienced frontiersmen or biological scientists but others might realise ‘those plants do not look right and they are moving unnaturally’.

There is a sudden curious rustle through the forest, as if many plants were shaking in the wind – only there is no wind. Forewarned Travellers will notice the ‘seed pods’ make a final movement and begin to pulse as if about to vomit. The Referee should ask for one action from each Traveller at this point. Anyone who asks for additional information or cannot provide a clear, decisive action within a few seconds is standing staring in puzzlement when the seed pods start spitting tiny spines and disgorging clouds of spores.

The attack is not precisely targeted; it is more a matter of spitting large numbers of spines into the general area where the Travellers are standing. Travellers may make an Average (8+) DEX check. Those who were forewarned receive DM+4 on this check. Apply the Effect to a 2D roll on the Spine Attack table.

Spine Attack

2D + EFFECT	RESULT
2 or less	The Traveller is hit by multiple sprays of spines. Roll 1D for how many and in addition the Traveller is exposed to spores.
3–4	The Traveller is hit by D3 sprays of spines and is exposed to spores.
5–6	The Traveller is hit by a spray of spines and is exposed to spores.
7–8	The Traveller is hit by a small number of spines and is exposed to spores.
9–10	The traveller is hit by a small number of spines.
11–12	The Traveller is hit by a few spines.
13 or more	The Traveller is not hit.

The effects of this initial barrage of spines and spores could be lethal or trivial, depending on how well the Travellers react. Armour, unless it is of a sealed suit type, is treated as half Protection against spines as they will find weak points and gaps. The severity of spore effects will depend on the Traveller's respiratory protection – again, a sealed suit will give full protection.

A Spray of Spines inflicts D3x1D damage.

A Small Number of Spines inflicts D3xD3 of damage.

A Few Spines inflict 1D damage.

Spores are irritating to eyes and will cause coughing if inhaled. There is no chance of this if the Traveller is wearing a full-face mask and a respirator or even a cloth over the face will reduce the severity of contact. A Traveller exposed to spores must make an immediate Average (8+) END check, with DM+4 if wearing protection for the mouth and nose. If the check is failed, twice the negative Effect is applied as a DM on all actions for the next 2D minutes. An Effect of –6 results in serious respiratory distress – the Traveller is incapacitated for 2D minutes but will not suffer permanent harm.

Spore exposure may cause minor cold-like symptoms over the next few days but is not particularly harmful to humans in the long term. This is because the spores

are not tailored to kill humans. Given time and some specimens to work with the Biologicals could come up with an agent that will kill and might even be able to turn it into a plague that can be transmitted from one human to another.

Investigating the Ambush Site

Once the initial attack has occurred, it is entirely possible to run clear of the danger zone. Astute Travellers will note where the vegetation returns to normal and will be able to spot the absence of seed pods. Once clear of this area the Travellers could proceed but may wish to investigate – especially if they suspect the Deepnight Entity is involved.

Anyone venturing back into the danger zone will be attacked but not with anything like the intensity of the first salvo. Simply ignoring the threat and working normally is in fact a viable option. If so, each Traveller will be attacked every 2D rounds – on average about once every 40 seconds or so. Roll on the Spine Attack table for the severity of the attack but with DM+6. It is not possible to conduct a detailed search or dig in the ground whilst jumping evasively about.

Clever Travellers may choose to trip attacks and evade them, or have a spotter for those who are working. A spotter can warn when a seed pod has aligned itself and started to pulse, enabling the targeted Traveller to evade it. Measures of this sort require an Average (8+) DEX check. The Effect of this check is added to the DM+6 noted before, as a minor response is triggered and (hopefully) dodged.

By triggering a pod and evading the spray of spines, the Travellers create a safe zone until other pods can be aligned or more spines can be pushed into place. This allows a proper investigation of the ambush site. By checking for the greatest concentration of non-local vegetation the Travellers can find the centre – a large tree festooned with pods but otherwise not unusual. Chopping this tree down will make no difference but buried under its roots is a braincase (see page 32), placed some months ago when the Biologicals began their campaign against the logging camp. Evidence of digging has almost – but not quite – been covered by the natural processes of the forest.

The braincase is essentially defenceless. It is tethered to the tree roots by tendrils and root-like structures snake away to other plants in the area. Cutting these frees the braincase but also cuts off its supply of food and oxygen. It will begin to die straight away, although this process takes days and can be reversed by feeding oxygen and sugary liquids into the right orifices.

The Biologicals might send some ambulators to defend the braincase if the Referee thinks this appropriate but a horde of enemies should not be dumped on a band of Travellers already suffering serious effects from the spine-spitter ambush. The Referee should also note that it is possible to insert personnel into the forest from above and that an evacuation could be carried out using a hovering spacecraft. What would not be possible is following the Biologicals' trail but if they think of it the Travellers could mark the spot, pull out by means of a harness lowered from a spacecraft and return the next day to follow the trail in daylight.

THE BIOLOGICALS' HOME SITE

The Biologicals' home site consists of a broad mound in the forest floor, surrounded by a region of modified vegetation. The mound was once a 'bioship', around 4,000 tons in displacement, which misjumped into the region and landed in the forest to regenerate itself. This proved impossible; the ship died, leaving the handful of Biological braincases aboard stranded. They grew grower-vines and assembled new bodies, then began exploring the area. At first they ignored the humans noisily chopping at the edge of the forest but eventually the Biologicals realised they were a potential threat.

Ambulators were sent to obtain samples, which led to conflict with the loggers. Once the humans intruded too many times, an attack became inevitable. The Biologicals wiped out the camp, brought the dead and wounded back to their mound and made a study of them. The dead are buried around the site – not because the Biologicals have any respect for the dead but because they will make better fertiliser that way. A handful of survivors are kept in a pen within the bioship.

The Biologicals will defend their dead ship, using kill-zones controlled by nearby braincases and ambulators to stage an ambush. Their sole heavy lifter is held in reserve, ready to charge into the Travellers if they are winning the fight. There will be no negotiation with the Biologicals; they will attack the Travellers on sight and keep fighting until defeated. At that point the survivors will attempt to gather any loose braincases they can and retire deeper into the forest.

The Travellers can win this fight only by inflicting severe casualties on the Biologicals. Specifically, this means destroying the heavy lifter and locating the primary grow-vine that must then be destroyed. Killing the vine itself is not enough; the braincase at its roots must be eliminated. How many ambulators the Biologicals have is up to the Referee; it should be enough to make this



a hard fight but the exact number does not have to be specified since additional ambulators are scattered throughout the surrounding countryside.

Staging the Fight

The fight takes place under the tree canopy, against enemies that are the same shade and general appearance as the forest surrounding them. All attack rolls with ranged weapons suffer DM-2, other than point-blank shots, increasing to DM-4 if the range is over 50 metres. The same penalty applies to spotting ambulators or ambush vines. Figuring out where a near-silent spray of spines came from is difficult at best; Travellers can attempt an Average (8+) Recon check with the above DMs to locate the source of fire. Shooting in the direction of a best guess is an exercise in futility.

It is not possible to sneak up on the Biologicals through the forest and indeed there is little benefit to surprise even if the Travellers come up with some clever trick like rappelling in through the canopy from a hovering craft. This will allow a rescue team to reach the captives quickly, however. If not, the Travellers will need to fight their way to them and out again.

The Biologicals will wait until the Travellers are in the open before attacking, unless they trigger a response by starting to move away or getting too close. Ideally, they want to catch the Travellers between their defences – consisting of ambulators and vines with spine spitters – and a second group of ambulators shadowing the Travellers as they approach. If the Travellers are wary, they may detect those behind and engage them before reaching the kill-zone, taking out part of the enemy force and clearing their line of retreat.

Once combat begins, some of the ambulators will move to where the captives are penned and begin killing them without mercy. If the Travellers do not prevent this or affect a rescue the captives will be all slain. The Referee can demonstrate the Biologicals' otherness by the way they murder wounded captives without hesitation. This will hopefully create a sense of urgency among the Travellers, forcing them to take more dramatic action than sniping from safe positions in the forest.

The mound no longer has significance to the Biologicals – when it was a ship, they valued it but now it is a half-decomposed carcass well on its way to becoming a hill. However, their main grow-vine is planted high on the hillside and they will defend that. This is one of the few ways to seize the initiative from the Biologicals; they will rush to protect the vine whereas normally they fight without regard to the safety or welfare of any of their kind.

Killing the braincase under the main vine will render the site more or less valueless to the Biologicals and they will begin retreating into the forest. The heavy lifter will be deployed to cover this retirement if it has not already been brought down and but is more likely to be used in a headlong charge to stop the Travellers reaching (and digging up) the braincase. It will take 2D rounds to dig down to the braincase with hand tools, although a suitably large explosive device will deal with the problem more immediately. Once the lifter and the main vine are eliminated, the remaining ambulators will scatter into the forest. They will stop firing except in self-defence, since there is nothing worth fighting for here anymore. The Referee should note that the Biologicals do not provide covering fire for one another, nor cooperate in anything but the most basic manner.

AFTERMATH

It is likely the fight will end with what appears to be a sudden collapse of the Biologicals' will to fight. As they learn more about the Biologicals the Travellers may realise they have no such thing as morale. The loss of the main vine made this site no more valuable than any other stretch of forest, so they retired. The Travellers may also come to realise that the Biologicals can establish themselves – eventually – wherever a braincase can be planted within an area of vegetation. If the locals do not eliminate them, the Biologicals will eventually resurge. Whether they come into conflict with humans at that time depends on where they set up their new site and whether humans encroach. The biologicals are not territorial as such and have no concept of enmity. They take what they need when they can; nothing more or less than that.

If any of the captives survive they can tell of their ordeal. The Biologicals brought them here, penned them and killed any who tried to escape. Those who died were dissected but the living were simply observed most of the time. A couple of the captives were tortured by being cut or having sharp tendrils driven into their flesh but the Travellers may realise that this was a crude way of taking tissue and blood samples rather than the deliberate infliction of pain. The Biologicals are relentless and have no mercy but they are not cruel.

Excavating the mound reveals it to be similar to a starship in many ways, although its structures are now half-decomposed and filled with soil. This creates a rich source of nutrients for the main grow-vine, within which some of the original structures can be discerned. The components of the Biologicals' thrust generation system and jump drive decayed long ago, although enough remains to determine their function. There is no equivalent to a bridge; command functions were carried

out by a braincase, possibly with the assistance of others for very complex functions such as jump plotting. There is simply no way to obtain star charts or other navigational data from the dead ship.

RESEARCHING THE BIOLOGICALS

The Biologicals have been on Wildwood for many years. They are far from their home region and became stranded due to a problem with their ship. Some bioships use jump drives manufactured by races they have coerced, built into the biological structure of the vessel. The ship at Wildwood is not one of those; it has a wholly biological jump drive. That is one reason it crashed; attempts by the Biologicals to perfect a bio-jump drive have been less than successful.

The implications of both these concepts may worry the Travellers. They may ask... if the Biologicals can grow a jump drive, could the Deepnight Entity do so? The answer is yes... and no. The Biologicals have been trying to create a working drive in this manner for millennia and have thus far only managed to produce an unreliable system that takes decades to grow and typically breaks down after just a few jumps. Of course, the wild misjumps produced by this system could spread the entity just as effectively as a controlled jump.

When the Travellers eventually meet a bioship with a working jump drive, they may be surprised to find a standard technological system at the heart of a

biological starship. What is more surprising – or perhaps not – is that the design is familiar. The Biologicals clearly did not develop the jump drive themselves; everything else they produce is biological in nature. Plus, the design is very similar to those used in Charted Space. The Travellers may wonder if this is due to the nature of jump drive technology itself or did the Biologicals get the drive from someone else? This question is answered in *Voidshore*.

It appears that the Biologicals' braincase and grown-body symbiosis is the result of evolution, although it may have been forced at some point. That is to say, it is possible the Biologicals once consisted of braincases that resided in a single type of body and somehow transcended this existence to allow movement of consciousness between host bodies. This is similar to the concept of transhumanism, only in that case a consciousness resides in an artificial technological body rather than a custom-grown one.

The Biologicals show no sign of infestation with the Deepnight Entity but study of their basic structure and biochemical functions indicates they have a natural resistance to infestation. This bears a striking similarity to the Droyne counteragent encountered at the very beginning of the expedition and those encountered since. These were left behind by the Ancients' expedition, so it may be that the Biologicals had some kind of interaction with Oyskrusk's expedition to Terminus Point. At this stage it is not possible to determine if this was the case.



THE COMMONWEALTH ENTANGLEMENT

As the Travellers complete their task on Wildwood – which is potentially before the situation on Grit is resolved – an additional problem presents itself. This takes the form of a jump emergence – a big one. The new arrival is identified by the Travellers' sensors as a small cruiser or bulk freighter but local databases indicate it is an *Indomitable* class aviation cruiser – one of the finest warships deployed by the Federated Commonwealth of Homeworlds.

The cruiser broadcasts a greeting identifying itself as CSS *Illustrious*, on a mission of exploration and goodwill along the coreward frontier. This may or may not be true but local sources can tell the Travellers that whilst the Commonwealth does sometimes use its big cruisers for such missions, it is highly uncommon to see one this far out. The craft mix deployed by the cruiser also undermines its ostensible mission profile – *Illustrious* is carrying a standard combat-and-intervention mix of fighters and support boats rather than the scientific and utility craft that might be expected.

CSS *Illustrious* repeatedly states her friendly intentions and invites captains of any ships in the system to come aboard for a goodwill visit. Her interceptors do, however, shepherd away a small trader that gets too close; the Travellers will recognise she is maintaining a healthy security envelope. Governors of cities are also invited aboard and within hours support boats are on their way to the planetary surface to pick up local dignitaries.

If the Travellers identify themselves, they will find the officers of CSS *Illustrious* very interested in them. It is obvious they have heard of the Travellers. An invitation to dine with the captain is issued, although this will have to take place after the reception whose invitees are already coming aboard. The flight control officer of *Illustrious* will not be keen on letting foreign ships dock in the hangars of a Commonwealth cruiser but after some consultation with his superiors permission is given.

CSS ILLUSTRIOUS

The Travellers are welcomed aboard CSS *Illustrious* by a formal side party led by a sublieutenant. Personnel are smartly turned out and seem professional, although anyone familiar with the pageantry of the Imperium is unlikely to be impressed. These Commonwealth spacers

are good but it is a 'C+' sort of good when it comes to putting on a show. Likewise, operating procedures are competent enough but nothing special. By local standards these guys are amazing but standards of training are not up to those the Travellers are used to. Nevertheless, the ship is clean and well maintained and personnel are clearly good at what they do.

A formal reception for the planetary dignitaries is scheduled for an hour's time but in the interim the Travellers are invited to meet with Captain Ulyne Lainge in the wardroom. Captain Lainge is in full dress uniform – which is more functional than decorative – and makes formal introductions before inviting the Travellers to seat themselves and partake of refreshments.

Lainge of course wants to know everything about the Travellers and their mighty ship but also about their encounter with the Biologicals. There is a limit to what he will divulge in return but the Travellers can trade information for information. Lainge's official line is that his ship is on a long cruise from the Commonwealth for a variety of reasons – 'shake some hands, hunt some pirates, make some friends and see what's out there', as he puts it. This is not untrue; the Commonwealth does this sort of thing when its ships are not needed for something more urgent. However, what Lainge does not divulge at first is that his mission orders contained an additional component.

If the Travellers seem forthcoming and truthful, Lainge will tell them that the Commonwealth has become aware of the Biologicals after finding an enclave on a remote world and received information that something similar had been sighted in this area. He was ordered to take CSS *Illustrious* out to Tradeport and scout the surrounding area, gaining all information possible before heading back to report. It has been a very long cruise – although not by the standards of the Travellers' voyage – but his reconnaissance led him here. Finding a group of Travellers from Old Earth – this is how he phrases it, suggesting he knows nothing of the Imperium or Charted Space today – was an unexpected complication.

Lainge is clearly used to bargaining from the bridge of a cruiser. He is polite but expects to get what he wants. In this case, what he wants is complete access to all the Travellers' data and a detailed report on what

happened on Wildwood. He promises to reciprocate with his own findings. The situation may strike the Travellers as ironic; they are stuck on a backwater planet with a powerful ship in orbit and the captain of that ship does not realise how much more powerful *Deepnight Revelation* is than his own vessel.

If the Travellers are recalcitrant, Lainge's polite demeanour is replaced by cold formality. He needs their data and is empowered by the Commonwealth to seize it. He has personnel ready to go planetside and simply take what he needs but would prefer to make a mutually beneficial trade. If the Travellers refuse to order their people to hand over samples and data, they will be held aboard CSS *Illustrious* and Lainge 'will not be held responsible' for any injuries received by personnel resisting his own when they seize the Travellers' data. Those who resist and survive will face Commonwealth justice; those who comply will be released unharmed.

Lainge cannot be swayed by threats. He has seen a Grand Republic battlecruiser; he is not frightened of a long-range exploration vessel of any size. In this, he is certainly being arrogant but not without good reason. He simply does not comprehend the magnitude of technological advantage the Travellers possess. If the Travellers cooperate with good grace, they can join the reception and return planetside afterward. If not, they are politely detained until their data has been plundered, then released. If the Travellers decide to fight their way out of the situation they can try but the Referee should not be merciful on a group of heroes who try to take on an entire military starship.

FURTHER ENTANGLEMENTS

Assuming the Travellers do not get themselves killed aboard CSS *Illustrious* or whilst resisting the removal of their data, they will likely want to return to *Deepnight Revelation*. CSS *Illustrious* will arrive at Tradeport a little later – the Referee should time this such that the Travellers' ship is serviceable once more. In the meantime, if the Travellers have any contact with Captain Clayton she is, appalled but not surprised, that Lainge is in the area. He is the commanding officer she fell out with, back when they served aboard the frigate *Chesapeake*. He is, she asserts, an arrogant incompetent who will always find a way to blame others for his failings.

The Travellers now have a chance to pay Lainge back for his arrogance, or at least humble him a bit. Clayton's appraisal is unfair and based on her own inability to admit fault but certainly Lainge is used to being the biggest fish in the pond. He has already discounted the capabilities of *Deepnight Revelation*, on the assumption

that since she has travelled so far she must be a pure exploration ship rather than a warship. It is not until his sensor operators start giving him numbers, based on the size of *Deepnight Revelation's* spinal particle accelerator mount and similar characteristics that he begins to realise he may have made a mistake. At that point his priority becomes ensuring the Travellers do not turn hostile or neutralising them if they do.

Lainge is not out to make enemies; he knows he has made a gaffe and does not really know how to undo it. His solution, which may or may not work, is to bareface it out and pretend he was justified in everything he did. He does not explain his actions if he can avoid it – that speaks of weakness. Instead, he cites his remit from the Commonwealth to do what is necessary. This is every bit as valid as the Travellers' remit from the Imperium and ultimately based on the same concept. At Tradeport, the Travellers and Lainge have one thing in common – they wield as much authority as the power of their ship commands.

It is possible to build a working relationship with Lainge. The Travellers might have some fun inviting him aboard their ship and causally showing him technological wonders he has never dreamed of. The best part of this is watching Lainge inching away from a position where he is the overlord of the stars, dictating to the Travellers and everyone else, towards an alliance of friends and equals – and all without admitting that anything has changed.

If the Travellers can build a working relationship with Lainge, he will make good on his promise to tell the Travellers what he knows. This is not an enormous amount but the Commonwealth has had a couple of incidents with the Biologicals. Its scientists know in general terms about their ability to grow bodies for their braincases to operate and that they have biological starships apparently commanded the same way as these bodies. Lainge will also reveal the reason behind his mission to Tradeport; according to the Commonwealth's sources, someone has been selling biotechnological items on the local market. It was considered possible that these were connected with the Biologicals, so Lainge was sent to obtain samples by any means necessary. The mission was perhaps a long shot but the Commonwealth needs to know about the Biologicals. If pressed as to why this is so important, Lainge will admit that the Biologicals have wiped out two Commonwealth outposts – both to rimward of the main settled part of the Commonwealth – and have attacked starships in other systems. It is believed that this is the precursor to an invasion or campaign of extermination, so it is vital the Commonwealth learns as much as possible about this mysterious enemy before the storm breaks.

SAFE PASSAGE

The Travellers will not know it at the time but the incident on Wildwood and news that the Commonwealth is threatened by the Biologicals foreshadows the events of *Voidshore*. It will be some time before the Travellers get answers to their questions about the Biologicals but for now their ship is in much better condition and they are ready to begin transit to point FSN-X. Beyond lies the unknown region dubbed Voidshore.

Passing through the Far Side of Nowhere is in many ways a lot safer than the transit so far. There are human and occasionally Droyne populations on many worlds and spaceports where the crew can enjoy rest and relaxation. Spares, components, clothing and foodstuffs can be bought from people willing to take gold and precious metals in payment.

There are many opportunities for adventure along the way, some of which will be presented in the sixth expansion book to the *Deepnight* campaign, *Expeditions*. Many of these will be conventional Traveller adventures – indeed, it is possible to transplant published adventures from Charted Space to the Far Side of Nowhere with very few changes.

The Travellers' ship is so powerful that none of the local polities can challenge them without assembling a whole fleet. It is unlikely they will make such a nuisance of themselves that this is done, so for the most part the transit to FSN-X should be relatively simple. It is even possible the Travellers will be able to recruit additional personnel at the starports along the way. In short, the stopover at Tradeport and the transit through the relatively civilised Far Side of Nowhere is an opportunity to return the ship and crew to a high standard of efficiency. Another chance is unlikely, so whatever the Travellers leave the Far Side of Nowhere with is what they have to confront the *Deepnight* Entity at Terminus Point.

INTERACTIONS

The character of the Commonwealth is illustrated by the incident with CSS *Illustrious*. The Commonwealth is assured of its superiority and more than a little smug about it but awed by the power of *Deepnight Revelation*. The Commonwealth does not want the Travellers to ally with the Grand Republic but beyond

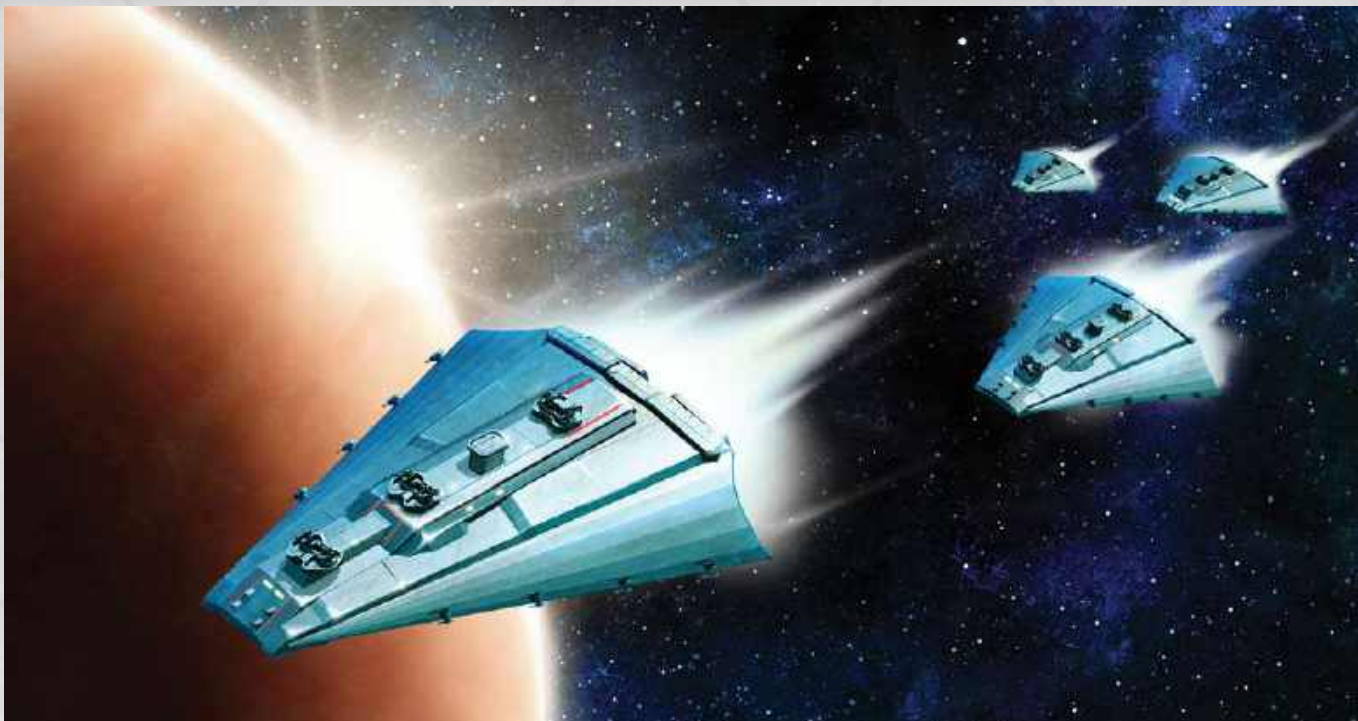
that they are a complication best kept at arm's length; if the Travellers do not antagonise the Commonwealth they will be permitted to pass through Commonwealth space without harassment.

Commonwealth officials may even request that *Deepnight Revelation* assists in learning more about or defeating the Biologicals. The Travellers do not really have time for this but could assist in various small ways. One option would be to drop record buoys at agreed points, containing whatever information the Travellers have obtained. Alternatively, if they have space, the Travellers could carry some small jump-capable research ships – probably converted *Distant Rangers* – well beyond the rimward bounds of Commonwealth space. These ships will then explore in a generally homeward direction, meeting a larger expedition as it heads outward.

The Commonwealth will consider agreeing to this plan an act of significant goodwill on the part of the Travellers and will do everything in its power to facilitate their progress. This is not entirely altruistic – it gets the Travellers out of the region as quickly as possible and allows the Commonwealth to escort *Deepnight Revelation* through sensitive systems. Most importantly, it will prevent the Travellers striking a deal with the Grand Republic.

The Grand Republic is both more militaristic and more paranoid than the Commonwealth. Where Commonwealth officials are used to the idea of a military ship being genuinely used for exploration, those of the Grand Republic are less likely to believe such a powerful ship could really be operating solo so far from home. The politics of the Grand Republic is such that mistakes are not readily forgiven, so governors are unlikely to exercise much initiative regarding *Deepnight Revelation*. If the Travellers enter Grand Republic space they will be requested to go to the nearest hub world where the governor will treat them like heroes – but also warn them against penetrating further into the Grand Republic without permission.

Permission will not be forthcoming. Couriers will be sent to inform the central government and ask for instructions and without central clearance no governor



will grant permission to proceed. Once past the outer systems the Travellers will be challenged at every system that has a patrol vessel and ordered to leave Grand Republic space. This might be comical, coming from a little corvette, but the ports of the hub worlds are closed to any ship without a clearance code and one will not be issued. It is quite possible for the Travellers to proceed across the Grand Republic anyway, refuelling in backwater systems and picking up supplies on worlds lacking the ability to do more than protest. The high jump capability of *Deepnight Revelation* will not at first be appreciated, meaning the inevitable search is targeted in the wrong places.

The level of alarm caused by a gigantic high-tech warship proceeding at will through Grand Republic space cannot be understated. Transiting without permission is a hostile act even if the Travellers have no ill intentions and the Grand Republic's leaders cannot risk the possibility that an attack will be made at some point. The Travellers will trigger the largest naval movement in the region for centuries, with fleets forming at key points to be led by the Marshals of the Republic.

This does not have to lead to violence. The Travellers might realise what they have done and agree to withdraw, slightly embarrassed at the trouble they have caused... or they might just jump past the fleets and proceed regardless. Sooner or later, they will encounter one of the groups sent to intercept or hunt them. This encounter might be a firm-but-friendly greeting at the border or a head-on attack, depending on the Travellers' actions.

Battlecruiser Squadron Vilaceq

There are many Grand Republican naval formations positioned to intercept the intruder. The one the Travellers run into is Battlecruiser Squadron Vilaceq, a tremendously potent (by local standards) force of four *Valiant* class battlecruisers commanded by a full Marshal of the Grand Republic – Marshal Sahia Vilaceq. Vilaceq is an elderly but vigorous woman, who has been determinedly staving off calls to retire for just another year or two for the past decade or more. She wears a permanent expression of weary indignation and has no time for nonsense.

Vilaceq is a good strategist and a loyal servant of the Grand Republic. She would like to come to a peaceful arrangement with the Travellers, which benefits the Grand Republic and keeps the Travellers out of its territory. In a perfect world she would like to gain control of *Deepnight Revelation* or turn its crew into firm allies but she is realistic about the prospects of either, so her offer to the Travellers is not negotiable – her force will escort them out of Grand Republic territory and they will go around rather than through. In return, their ship will be met by tankers and supply vessels along the way and every effort will be made to send the Travellers on their way safely and expeditiously.

If necessary, the squadron will fight. Vilaceq expects a tough battle but thinks four battlecruisers should be capable of disabling *Deepnight Revelation*. There is an outside possibility she will make an unprovoked attack.

One reason she might do this is to pre-empt the Travellers if she thinks they are about to launch an attack of their own and she might possibly exploit an opportunity to take out the great ship and learn its secrets but only if the Travellers give her a chance too good to pass up. Vilaceq knows how extreme this action is and suspects that the Travellers' home is actually much closer than they claim. She would only act in a way that could start a war if she felt it were absolutely necessary or if she could sucker punch *Deepnight Revelation* without anyone finding out what happened to her.

In short, the most likely outcome of this encounter is a careful exchange of diplomatic messages intended to convey the impossibility of proceeding through the territory of the Grand Republic and offering an alternative. If the Travellers ignore the warning they will have to fight Vilaceq and thereafter the whole Grand Republic will be ranged against them. Either way, the ports of every world in the Grand Republic are closed to *Deepnight Revelation*. There are easy routes around to trailing or spinward; the latter takes the Travellers between the Commonwealth and the Grand Republic.

FSN-X

As the Travellers proceed towards Point FSN-X, inhabited systems become less and less common. The occasional inhabited world might be found very far from the cores of the local polities but overall the Travellers will be aware they are once again voyaging across uncharted space. Then, as they emerge from jump and begin manoeuvring to set up a refuelling pass, sensors pick up a large metallic object. It is surrounded by a cloud of smaller objects, creating what is unmistakably a debris field.

Investigation reveals the mass of the cloud is around 30,000 tons and the object at its centre turns out to be two – the front and rear halves of a Grand Republic battlecruiser. It appears the ship's back was broken by a titanic impact and it suffered structural collapse a little later. The remainder of the debris cloud is predominantly metallic, consisting of fragments of the vessel. One of its gigantic mass driver turrets spins lazily a few kilometres from the wreck.

The hull shows signs of combat; a mix of impact damage and burns from laser fire. It is not clear from a distance what smashed the hull but a close inspection shows biological matter around the small impact points and the break-point of the main hull. Manoeuvring

in the debris field is hazardous due to jagged metal components and unpleasant because there are bodies floating in space. Most have no suits, which might raise some questions.

Boarding the wreck, the Travellers will find signs of a gunfight raging through the ship. The interior is heavily damaged and all computer nodes are slagged by demolition charges. There are human bodies within the ship but all wear vacc suits or emergency vacuum protection gear. The vast majority show signs of wounding by a similar means to the spine spitters the Travellers previously encountered.

This is the Grand Republic battlecruiser *Resolute*, sent rimward about six years ago to investigate rumours of a new alien threat. They certainly found one and now the Travellers know why *Resolute* did not return home. She was attacked in this system, struck by something powerful enough to break her back and then boarded by ambulators who overwhelmed her crew. The command areas held out long enough to slag all the data cores and control systems but ultimately fell. Crewmembers who were captured appear to have been spaced but there are not enough bodies to account for the whole crew.

Resolute is a write off but there are huge quantities of salvage if the Travellers are willing to take the time. Small to medium sized items such as small arms and machine tools can be stripped out quickly. There are spare vacc suits made for humans, clothing and even unopened ration packs. The captain's wine cellar is very good and lies untouched. Anything that was not destroyed in the fighting has been ignored, with two exceptions. Every piece of medical or life sciences equipment aboard the ship has been carefully removed, down to the floor bolts... and the jump drive is missing.

Finding the wreck of *Resolute* should be a shock and a warning for the Travellers. They now know that somewhere ahead, possible right across their intended route, there is a malevolent alien power that kills without mercy or remorse. This power has vessels capable of taking out a 30,000-ton battlecruiser. What level of threat is posed to *Deepnight Revelation*? Who are these Biologicals and what is their agenda? The answers may lie ahead in the region known as Voidshore – but if the Travellers have any sense they will hope these questions go unanswered.

APPENDIX: HIGHGUARD

The Travellers may encounter some starship components uncommon in Charted Space. Once they know about these items, the Travellers can build them or have them built and fitted at a local yard.

SWITCHABLE FUEL/CARGO CONTAINERS

Switchable fuel/cargo containers can carry fuel or cargo as needed, although a whole container must be used for one or the other. Swapping from fuel tankage to cargo space requires little more than flushing out the tanks to ensure no liquid hydrogen remains, then loading them up with cargo as needed. Equipment to do this

represents most of the cost of a container that otherwise uses standard hull and components like any other part of a ship.

Each ton of capacity in a cargo/fuel container requires 0.05 tons of additional equipment and costs Cr5000 per ton.

RETRACTABLE EXTERNAL SHELTER

A retractable external shelter allows a grounded starship to provide protection from the elements or micrometeorites to personnel working outside. A standard shelter can enclose a space equivalent to 10% of the ship's tonnage, although creative use of existing hull structures can greatly increase this. For example, the shelter fitted to the *Distant Ranger* class uses the space between the two secondary hulls, requiring only a floor and endpieces, creating a larger enclosed space for the same amount of equipment.

Shelters vary from one design to another. Some take the form of a lean-to, others a sort of rigid awning on the side of a starship. It is quite common to find shelters set up to enclose a cargo door, allowing personnel additional space to work whilst remaining protected. The standard shelter is robust but light, providing Protection +6 to anyone inside it and screening them from external view. Shelters are not airtight against vacuum but will keep a local atmosphere of normal pressure range out.

A heavy-duty or military shelter may or may not be fully enclosed but includes a number of solid metal/ceramic bulwarks and wire entanglements between them. These can be deployed or not, according to preference, and are stored inside the bulwarks. The effect is to surround the ship with ready-made positions of cover, which provide Protection +24 to anyone sheltering behind them and have a mounting for a light support weapon. Some assault craft use shelters of this sort to assist personnel in deploying into combat but they are also useful to prevent vehicles or large animals from approaching within a few metres of the ship.

A standard shelter can cover a volume up to 10% of the ship's displacement, consuming one ton for every 25 tons covered and costing MCr0.1 per ton. A military-grade shelter costs twice as much and consumes 50% more tonnage.

SMALL POWER PLANTS AND FUEL TANKS

The design techniques in use in the Far Side of Nowhere permit very small power plants to be produced, to a minimum of 1 Power output. Likewise, fuel tankage does not have to be a neat multiple of four weeks' endurance. A fuel tank can be any size down to 0.1 tons. For example, if a small craft using a TL12 fusion power plant needs Power 3, a 0.2 ton plant will suffice. This would require 0.02 tons of fuel per four weeks of

endurance; a minimal 0.1 ton tank would provide 20 weeks' endurance. The converse is also true. A five-ton fusion power plant needs 0.5 tons of fuel for four weeks' endurance but this might be more than a craft needs. It would be acceptable to give the craft 0.25 tons of fuel tankage, providing an operational duration of two weeks.

THRUST FOR REACTION DRIVES

Reaction drive craft do not normally proceed under maximum thrust at all times. Typically, a more modest 1-2g acceleration is used for course changes and craft will often coast for the majority of a transit or patrol. So, a craft with a Thrust 10 and enough fuel for four hours at this level of thrust can carry out a much longer mission providing high acceleration is not necessary.

One hour is 10 starship combat rounds, so this example craft with four hours' worth of fuel actually has what might be termed '40 Thrust rounds'. That is to say, it can operate at Thrust 10 for 40 turns of combat or Thrust 1 for 400 turns, or some combination not

exceeding Thrust 10 in any combat round. Commonly, a reaction drive craft will follow a pre-set course to its patrol area using low thrust and coasting most of the way, with enough reaction fuel for a few minutes of high-intensity manoeuvring. Upon reaching 'bingo' fuel – the point where the craft only has just enough fuel to get back to base – it must break off operations. Craft that cut this too fine, or which have too much velocity away from base when the decision is made to return, are likely to be lost. Similarly, a mobile base such as an aviation cruiser might move out of range of its fighters, dooming pilots to a slow death.

BULK ACCOMMODATION

Bulk accommodation is only suitable for large vessels, where extremely cramped living conditions are offset by significant working spaces. Enlisted personnel are allocated little more than a shelf-like bunk and a locker, with communal freshers in blocks. Petty officers and the most junior officers have tiny rooms, either solo or shared. It is not considered acceptable for any but the most junior of officers to live in such conditions, nor for

long-service or senior enlisted personnel to be housed in this way so a ship still needs conventional staterooms for these personnel. A bulk accommodation block can house a maximum of 36 personnel but a ship can have multiple accommodation blocks. A block consumes six tons plus one ton per person housed, at a cost of Cr100000 per ton.

CAPITAL TURRETS

The Grand Republic has a preference for vessels armed with multiple bay weapons rather than spinal weaponry. Bays can be mounted normally or can be carried in capital turrets – bay-sized turrets that can traverse and bring the weapons to bear without having to manoeuvre the whole ship. A capital turret can carry one bay weapon of a size according to its class.

Capital turrets can only be mounted on a vessel designed to use them; this uses up 1% of the ship's tonnage at a cost of MCr0.01 per ton and cannot be retrofitted as the capability is built into the ship's hull. The number of capital

turrets a ship will carry must be specified at the time of design and cannot be increased without a major rebuild. Capital turrets can be left unused, of course, in which case the cost and tonnage is still required but power need not be provided. A bay weapon mounted in a capital turret does not take up additional hardpoints – that cost is already paid.



A weapon mounted on a capital turret has a reduced negative DM to hit small targets. When firing at a target under 100 tons capital turret weapons suffer DM-2. When firing at a target of 2,000 tons or less the penalty is DM-1. A weapon in a capital turret is treated as having armoured bulkheads around it and its mechanism.

It is possible to mount other systems in a capital turret, should the need arise. Instead of a small bay a small capital turret can hold 40 tons of shipboard systems. A medium capital turret can hold 90 tons of systems and a large capital turret could hold 475 tons.

Item	Cost (MCr)	Tons	Hardpoints	Power Required	Minimum Ship Tonnage
Small Capital Turret	2	55	3	4	5,000
Medium Capital Turret	5	110	6	6	10,000
Large Capital Turret	10	550	10	8	20,000

MASS DRIVER CANNON

The standard mass driver in *High Guard* is an orbital artillery (ortillery) weapon intended for devastating ground targets. Those used by the Grand Republic are ship-to-ship weapons which could, in theory, be used for ground bombardment. Mass driver cannon are bay weapons and ill-suited to a standard bay mounting. They fire unguided projectiles usually referred to as rod penetrators, designed to punch through an armoured target and cause damage by delivery of kinetic energy. Travelling at a reasonable percentage of lightspeed, rod penetrators are devastating if they hit but less likely to do so than a laser or guided weapon, especially at long range.

A mass driver cannon (MDC) in a standard bay mount (often referred to as a casemate mount in the Grand Republic) suffers DM-2 to attack rolls at all ranges, in addition to the usual DM for bay weapons against small

targets (DM-4 against targets under 100 tons, DM-2 against targets of 2,000 tons and under) and modifiers for range. An MDC in a capital turret suffers only the range modifier for mass driver cannon and any targeting penalty for a small ship. Note that range penalties refer only to vessels and craft that can manoeuvre under power or other objects that might change velocity.

Mass driver cannon do not have a maximum range. Projectiles will travel on forever unless they are captured by a gravity well or strike something. In theory a stray projectile might hit a ship thousands of years after being fired but this is highly unlikely.

A mass driver cannon comes with a ready-ammunition magazine sufficient for 12 salvoes. Ammunition is much lighter than that used in the *High Guard* mass driver bay.

MDC Range Penalties

Range	DM	MDC Type	Bay	TL	Power	Damage	Cost	Tons Per Attack	Traits
Adjacent	—	Light Mass Driver Cannon	Small	10	25	1DD	MCr50	1	AP4
Close	—								
Short	—	Heavy Mass Driver Cannon	Medium	10	50	2DD	MCr75	2	AP8
Medium	—								
Long	-1	Superheavy Mass Driver Cannon	Large	10	75	3DD	MCr150	4	AP12
Very Long	-2								
Distant	-4								

RAILGUN BARBETTE

Another weapon favoured by the Grand Republic is the rail gun barbette. Primarily used aboard large warships for small craft defence and point defence against missiles, railguns deployed by the Grand Republic are smaller than those seen in Charted Space and less potent. A railgun barbette is a heavy framework containing a rapid-slewing weapon and its feed system, consuming one hardpoint and five tons. This includes sufficient ammunition for 12 attacks. Additional ammunition consumes one ton per 24 attacks.

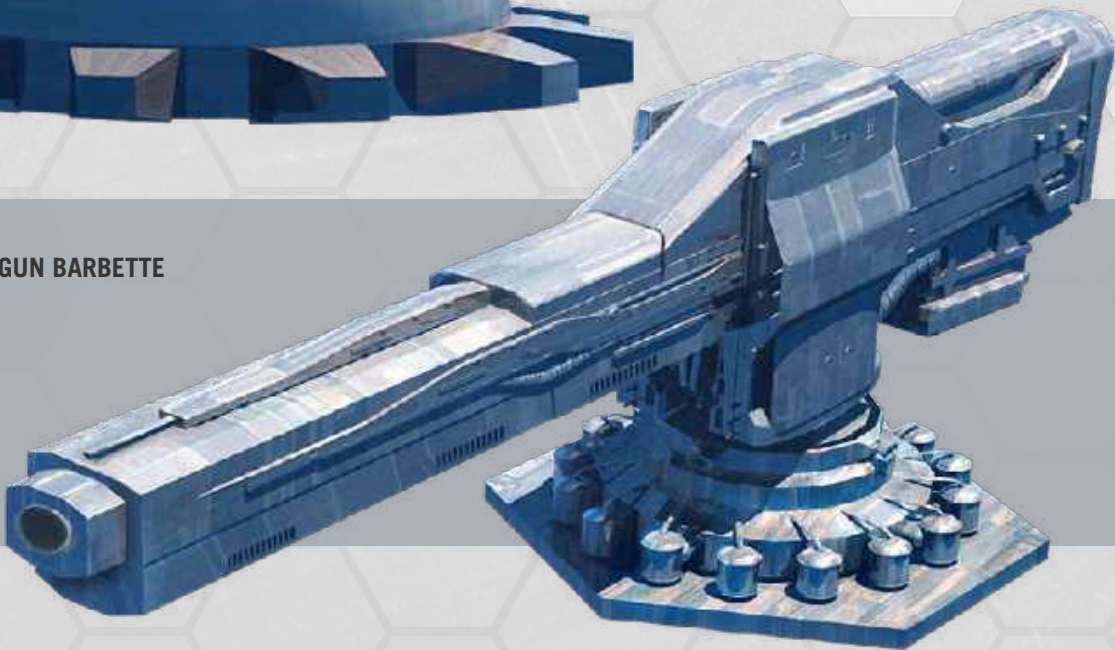
Railguns can fire in two modes: point defence or offensive. In offensive mode the weapon slows its rate of fire in order to produce a higher muzzle velocity, granting good penetration if limited damage. A railgun barbette has the AP trait, equal to the rolled damage. In point defence mode the weapon delivers a spray of projectiles at a lower muzzle velocity, increasing chances for an interception. When firing in point defence mode the rail gun barbette gains DM+2.

Mode	TL	Range	Power	Damage	Cost	Traits
Point Defence	11	Short	6	D3	MCr2	—
Offensive	11	Medium	6	1D	MCr2	AP Special



MASS DRIVER CANNON

RAILGUN BARBETTE



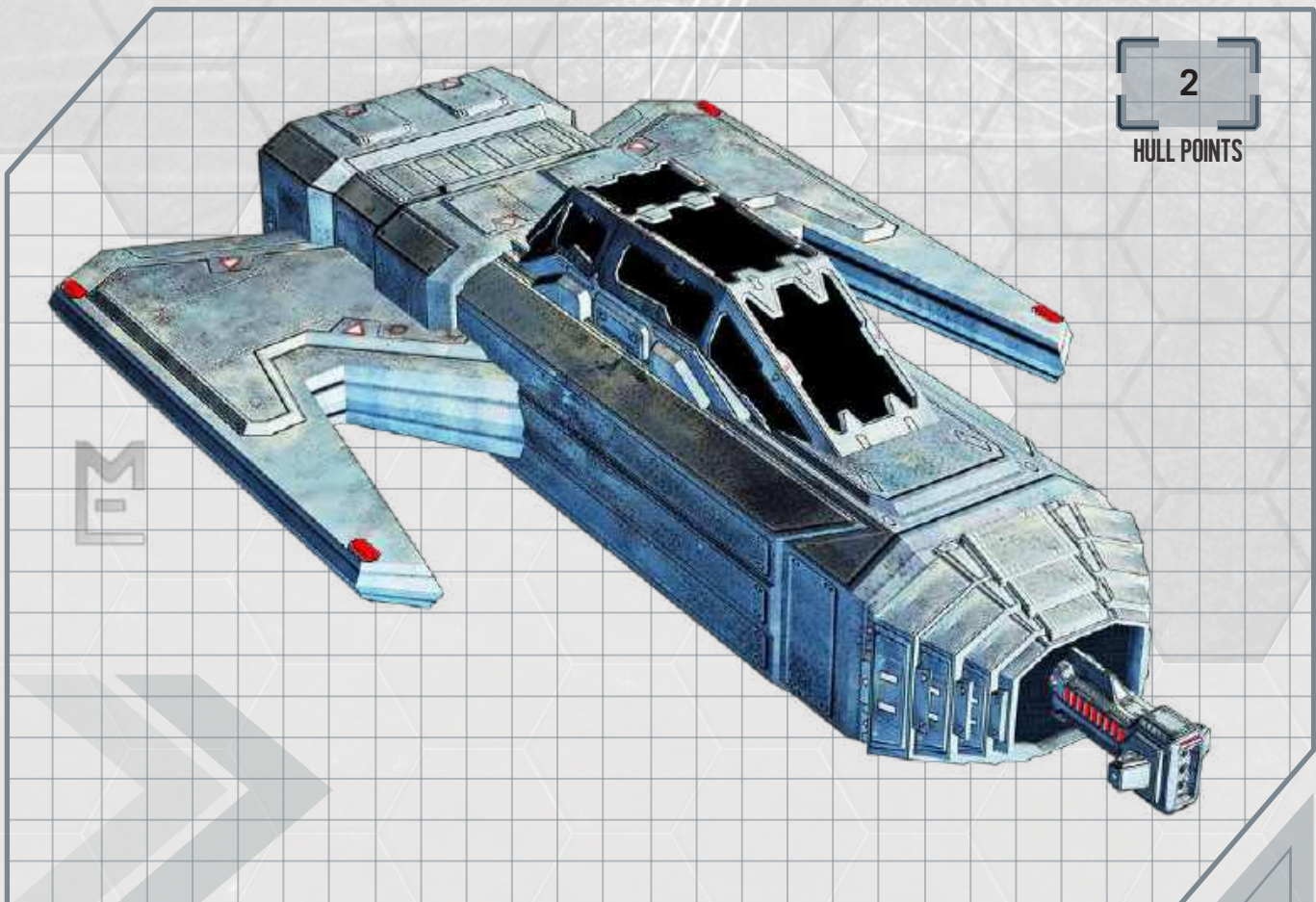
F-3A4 REACTION DRIVE INTERCEPTOR

Commonly known as the 'Thunderbolt' class, the F-3A4 is a Commonwealth design that has found its way into general use largely due to its low cost and ease of maintenance. It is about the smallest craft that can carry a significant combat weapon – in this case a pulse laser – and does so at the expense of operational endurance. The F-3A4 is built on a streamlined rectangular hull, with the pulse laser positioned forward in a fixed mounting. The pilot's blister canopy sits atop the very basic electronics package, with the drive, power plant and fuel tank aft.

Performance under full power is an impressive 12g acceleration and there is sufficient fuel to maintain this for slightly less than an hour. The power plant requires a nominal six tons of fuel for two weeks of operation but this is vastly longer than such a small craft could operate, if only due to pilot fatigue. A more realistic operational endurance is around six hours; this consumes a little more than 0.1 tons of fuel, leaving 1.36 tons for manoeuvring. The reaction drive consumes 1.8 tons of fuel per hour at full thrust, which equates to 0.015 tons of fuel per point of Thrust, per combat round.

The power plant's output is sufficient to run the craft's systems with a little left over, which is used to trickle-charge a battery pack when the F-3A4 is not engaged in combat operations. At full charge the batteries are able to operate the laser for an hour of combat or can be used to power the interceptor's systems if the power plant is shut down for any reason.

Nominal endurance is around six hours, assuming 30 minutes (five combat rounds) of maximum manoeuvring (using up 0.9 tons of fuel) and either coasting out to a patrol location or operating very close to a parent vessel. This is in keeping with the intended role of the F-3A4; it is an interceptor, intended to carry out rapid-response operations from a parent craft. The very low cost makes it attractive to non-Commonwealth operators that often try to shoehorn the craft into roles it was not designed for. In particular, the minimal sensor package can be a limiting factor but the F-3A4 is intended to operate under the direction of controllers aboard a parent or supporting craft.



F-3A4 REACTION DRIVE INTERCEPTOR

TL12		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	6 tons, Streamlined	—	0.36
Reaction Drive	Thrust 12	1.44	0.288
Power Plant	Chemical, Power 3	0.6	0.15
Fuel Tanks		1.46	—
Bridge	Cockpit	1.5	0.01
Computer	Computer/10	—	0.16
Sensors	Basic	—	—
Weapons	Fixed Pulse Laser	—	1.1
Systems	High Efficiency Batteries (power 40)	1	0.1
		TOTAL:	MCr 2.168

CREW

PILOT

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr181/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr2.168

POWER REQUIREMENTS

0

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

2

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

0

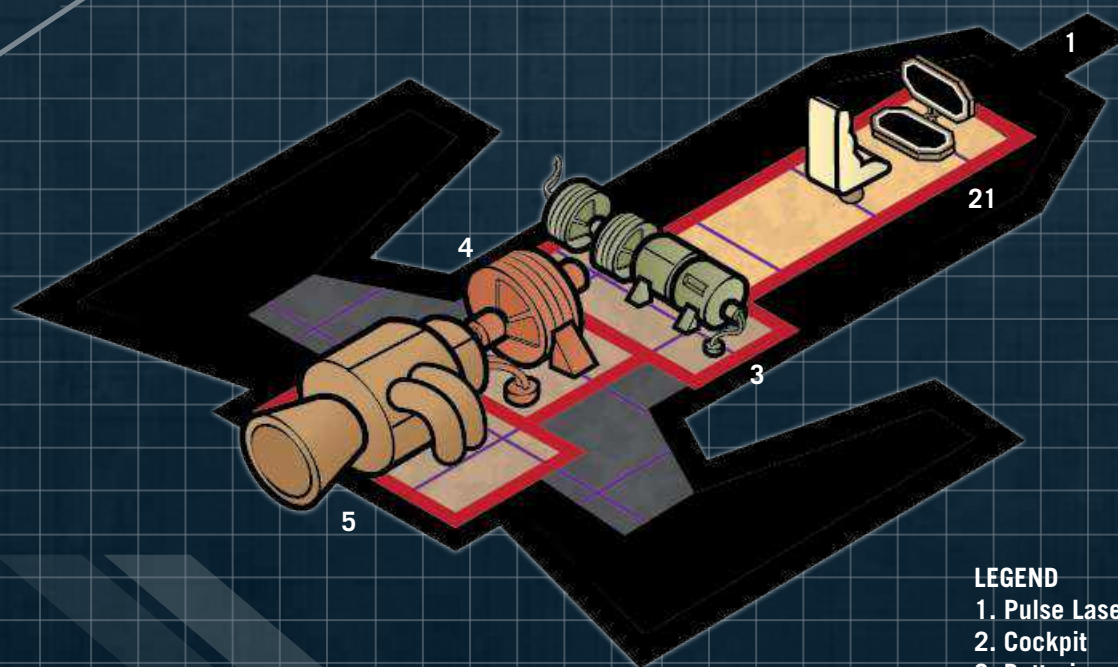
SYSTEMS

3

WEAPONS

0

SENSORS



LEGEND

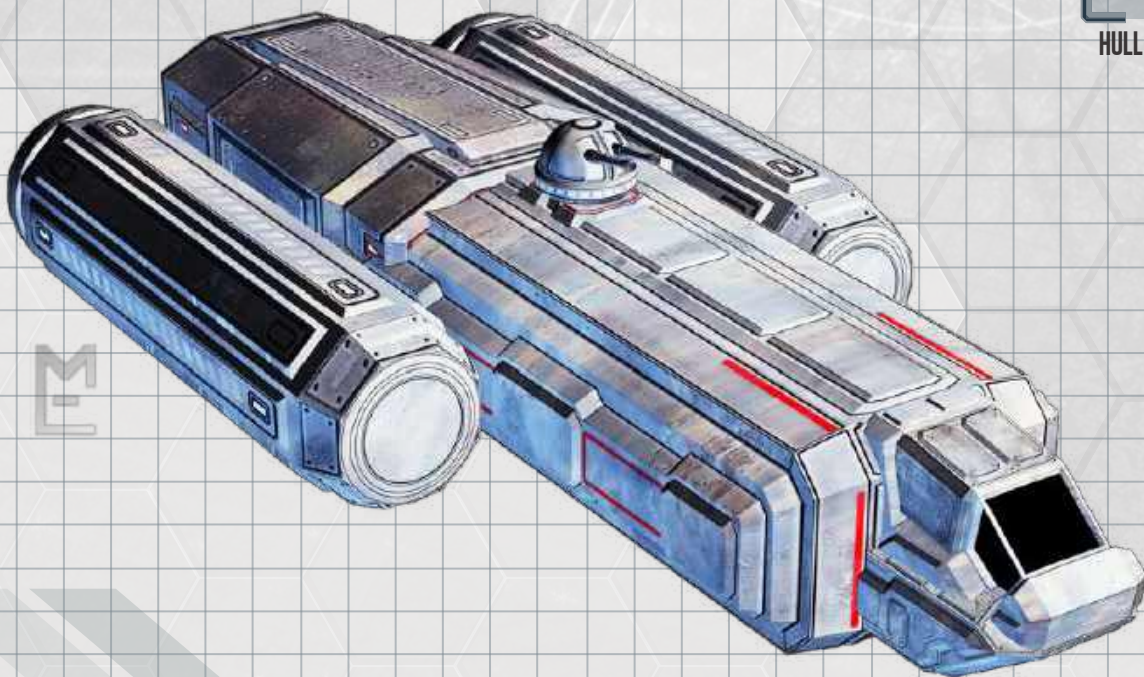
1. Pulse Laser
2. Cockpit
3. Batteries
4. Power Plant
5. Reaction Drive

U-27 HYBRID DRIVE SUPPORT VESSEL

The U-27 is another Commonwealth design that has become popular on the wider market and copies are produced, sometimes at lower Tech Levels, all across the region. The U-27 was developed as a rugged small transport craft able to fulfil a variety of roles including support for a flight of interceptors, personnel and cargo transport, customs work and even a light strike roles at need.

The U-27 is built on a streamlined more or less rectangular hull with a pair of secondary hull cylinders aft to house the reaction drive. A dual turret is mounted amidships on the dorsal surface, normally carrying a pair of pulse lasers. Two additional firmpoints are located at the fore end of the reaction drive cylinders, sometimes used to carry torpedoes or payload pods which might contain anything from probe drones to cargo intended for standoff delivery.

Performance under manoeuvre drive is modest but can be augmented with the reaction drive to allow one hour of high-speed manoeuvring. This is more commonly used to avoid combat than initiate it but the U-27 does see service as a law enforcement boat where it may have to chase down fleeing suspect craft. Cargo space is nominally just over 17 tons but this can vary. Some U-27s are refitted as electronic warfare craft, assault boats or fighter direction and support craft. In this role some of the cargo space may be repurposed to carry additional fuel that is transferred to fighters at need. The two sensor stations, located immediately behind the small bridge, are configurable for uses ranging from communications, sensor analysis, scientific research and fighter control.



30

HULL POINTS

U-27 HYBRID DRIVE SUPPORT VESSEL

TL12		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	70 ton, Streamlined	—	4.2
	Reinforced Hull	—	2.1
Armour	Crystaliron, Armour: 4	3.5	2.016
M-Drive	Thrust 2	1.4	2.8
Reaction Drive	Thrust 8	11.2	2.24
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 45	3	3
Fuel Tanks	13 weeks of operation	1	—
Fuel Tanks	1 hour at Thrust 8	14	—
Bridge	Small bridge	3	0.5
Computer	Computer/10	—	0.16
Sensors	Military	2	4.1
	Sensor Stations x2	2	1
Weapons	Dual Turret (pulse lasers)	1	2.5
Systems	High Efficiency Batteries (power 80)	2	0.2
	Cabin Space	6	0.3
	UNREP System (40 tons/hr)	2	1
Cargo		17.9	—
TOTAL: MCr 26.116			

CREW

PILOT, CO-PILOT

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST

C2176/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr26.116

POWER REQUIREMENTS

14

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

14

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

9

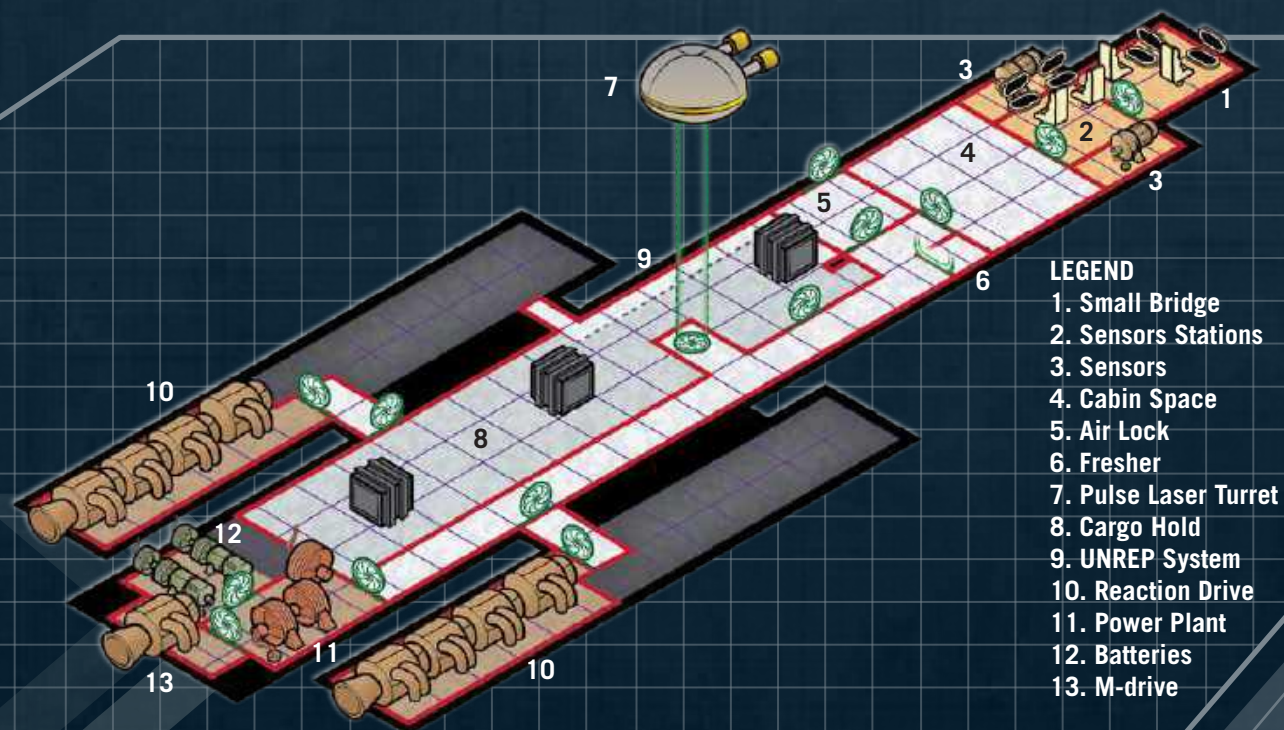
WEAPONS

2

SENSORS

2

SYSTEMS



LEGEND

1. Small Bridge
2. Sensors Stations
3. Sensors
4. Cabin Space
5. Air Lock
6. Fresher
7. Pulse Laser Turret
8. Cargo Hold
9. UNREP System
10. Reaction Drive
11. Power Plant
12. Batteries
13. M-drive

INDOMITABLE CLASS AVIATION CRUISER

Like many Commonwealth warships the *Indomitable* class uses traditional Terran vessel names loosely connected with the vessel's role and there is a general preference for class names not to be associated with individuals. The *Indomitable* is normally seen at the head of a task force but is quite capable of operating alone, especially where serious trouble is not expected such as a flag-showing cruise or when the vessel is carrying out an exploration mission.

Hull form is typical of Commonwealth designs, with a generally rectangular main hull and secondaries offset from it. In the case of the *Indomitable* there are three secondary hulls, each 120° from the next. The secondaries are more widely spaced from the main hull than is common on non-aviation vessels, to keep the recovery decks clear of the main drive. This results in a close structure rather than the usual standard configuration.

The secondary hulls are identical. Each contains a launch tube capable of handling 10 craft of up to 50 tons each and a recovery deck optimised for craft of up to 50 tons. There is hangar space for 600 tons of craft, with docking ports for craft too large to use the recovery deck. Each secondary hull also houses one of the ship's three large missile bays and stowage for additional missiles, a point defence network and a power plant capable of independently operating the secondary hull. Each secondary hull also has its own nuclear damper array.

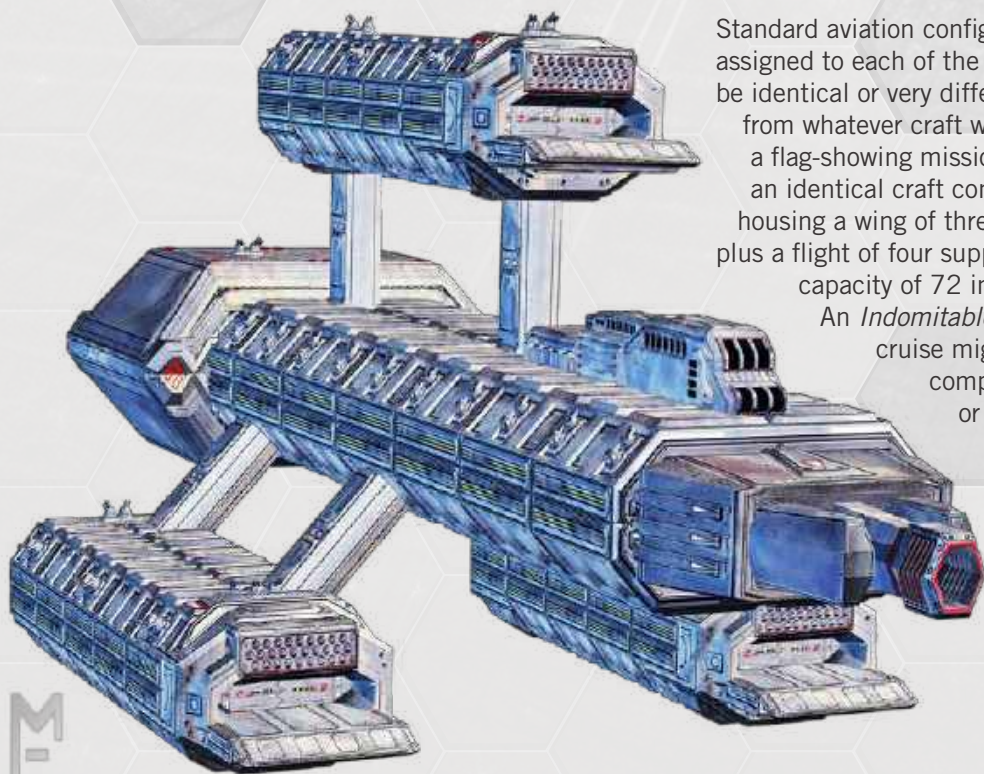
The main hull mounts the ship's primary weapon, a spinal particle accelerator, and has its own point-defence and nuclear damper batteries. Command spaces are forward, general operations amidships and drives aft. Accommodation for the command crew is relatively luxurious but most of the enlisted personnel live in bulk accommodation that would be inadequate but for the overall size of the vessel. Crewmembers sleep in tight spaces but have the opportunity to move around when off shift. It is standard practice to use hangar bays and other large working spaces for recreation and exercise when not on alert.

The overall design of the *Indomitable* is typical of the Commonwealth; inefficient in many ways and a bit confused about its exact role. The ship is meant to be a cruiser-carrier that can project power across a system and deal with frigate or destroyer type threats with ease. At the same time it is also expected to be able to switch roles and act as a disaster relief platform or exploration ship. Overall, the *Indomitable* can do a lot but is not particularly suited to any one task.

Performance is unusual, in that the ship carries sufficient fuel for three parsecs of jump transit but has a maximum capacity of jump-2. Officially the extra parsec worth of fuel is an emergency or tactical reserve, allowing the cruiser to jump into a system with enough fuel to escape a bad situation. A plan to fit a jump-3 drive never came to anything as it would require too much internal modification but the possibility exists for a specialist vessel to be refitted this way.

Standard aviation configuration is three wings, one assigned to each of the secondary hulls. The wings might be identical or very different and might even be formed from whatever craft were available at the time. On a flag-showing mission an *Indomitable* might carry an identical craft contingent – each secondary hull housing a wing of three squadrons of eight fighters, plus a flight of four support craft to give a total craft capacity of 72 interceptors and 12 support craft.

An *Indomitable* carrying out an exploration cruise might have an entirely different craft complement, emphasising support or specialist vessels with a smaller fighter contingent.



8,880

HULL POINTS

AVIATION CRUISER

INDOMITABLE-CLASS

TL12		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	20,000 tons, Close Structure	—	900
	Reinforced Hull	—	450
Armour	Crystaliron, Armour: 6	1,500	405
M-Drive	Thrust 2, Very Advanced (size reduction, energy efficient)	360	900
Jump Drive	Jump 2, Advanced (decreased fuel)	1,005	1658.25
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 15,000	1,000	1000
Fuel Tanks	J-2, J-1, 20 weeks of operation	6,200	—
Bridge		60	100
	Command Bridge	80	150
Computer	Core/70	—	80
Sensors	Improved	3	4.3
Weapons	Spinal Particle Accelerator (TL12)	3,150	1100
	Medium Missile Bays x3	300	75
	Dual Turrets (pulse lasers) x60	60	150
	Triple Turrets (beam laser, sandcasters x2) x60	60	120
	Point Defence Type II x4	80	40
	Nuclear Dampers x8	80	80
Ammunition	1-ton Munitions Stowage Area x30	30	—
	10-ton Munitions Stowage Area x3	30	—
Systems	Armoured Bulkheads (bridges, power plant)	114	22.8
	Docking clamps (Type II) x3	15	3
	Fuel Processor (2,000 tons/day)	100	5
	Armouries x8	8	2
	Brig	16	1
	Medical Bay	24	48
	Workshop	36	5.4
	UNREP System (200 tons/hour)	10	5
	Training Facilities x20	20	4
	Launch Tubes (50 tons) x3	1,500	750
	Recovery Decks (50 tons) x3	1,500	750
	Hangars (600 tons) x3	1,800	360
Staterooms	High x8	48	6.4
	Standard x60	240	30
	Bulk Accommodation (capacity 24) x5	150	15

TOTAL: MCr 9353.15

CREW

CAPTAIN, PILOTS X3,
ASTROGATOR, ENGINEERS X24,
MAINTENANCE X16, MEDICS
X6, GUNNERS X60, STEWARDS
X8, ADMINISTRATORS X8,
OFFICERS X12

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST
Cr779429/month

PURCHASE COST
MCr9353.15

POWER REQUIREMENTS

3,000

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

4,000

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

4,000

JUMP DRIVE

4

SENSORS

17,860

WEAPONS

100

FUEL PROCESSOR

1,536

SYSTEMS

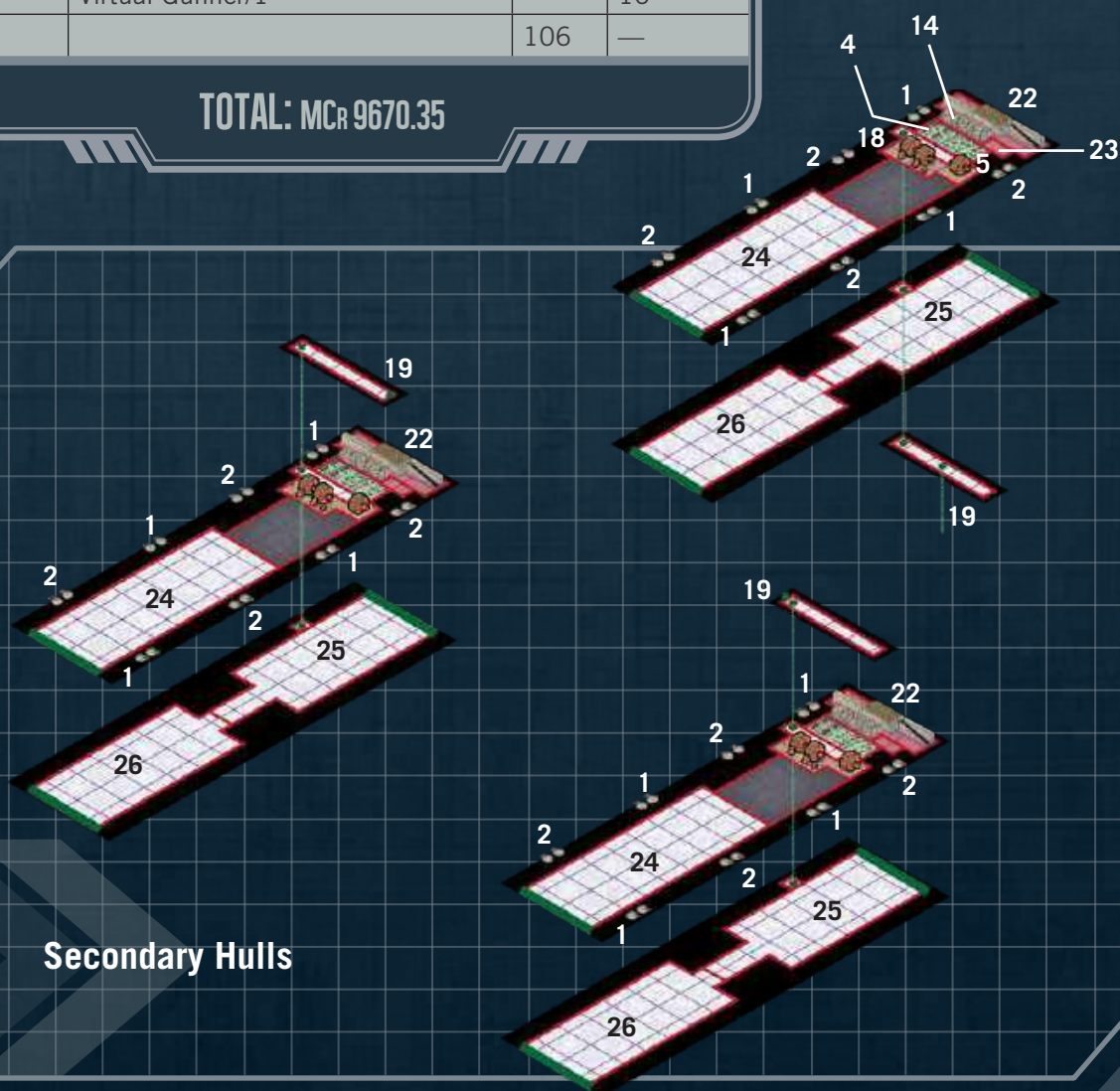
AVIATION CRUISER

INDOMITABLE-CLASS

TL12		TONS	COST (MCR)
Common Areas		240	24
Software	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
	Evade/2	—	2
	Fire Control/4	—	8
	Library	—	—
	Advanced Fire Control/3	—	18
	Anti-Hijack/2	—	8
	Battle System/2	—	24
	Electronic Warfare/1	—	15
	Launch Solution/3	—	12
	Point Defence/2	—	12
	Virtual Gunner/1	—	10
Cargo		106	—
TOTAL: MCR 9670.35			

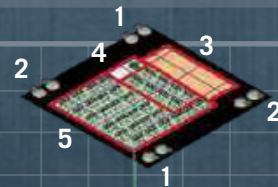
LEGEND

1. Triple Turret
2. Pulse Lasers Turrets
3. Bridge & Sensors
4. High Staterooms
5. Staterooms
6. Workshop
7. Training Facility
8. Armoury
9. Cargo Hold with UNREP
10. Common Area
11. Air Lock
12. Brig
13. Medical Bay
14. Nuclear Dampers
15. Point Defense
16. Particle Accelerator
17. Jump Drive

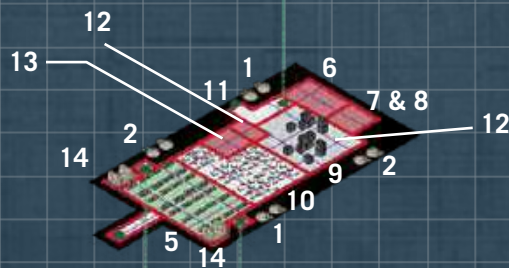


1 SQUARE = 25 TONS

Deck 4



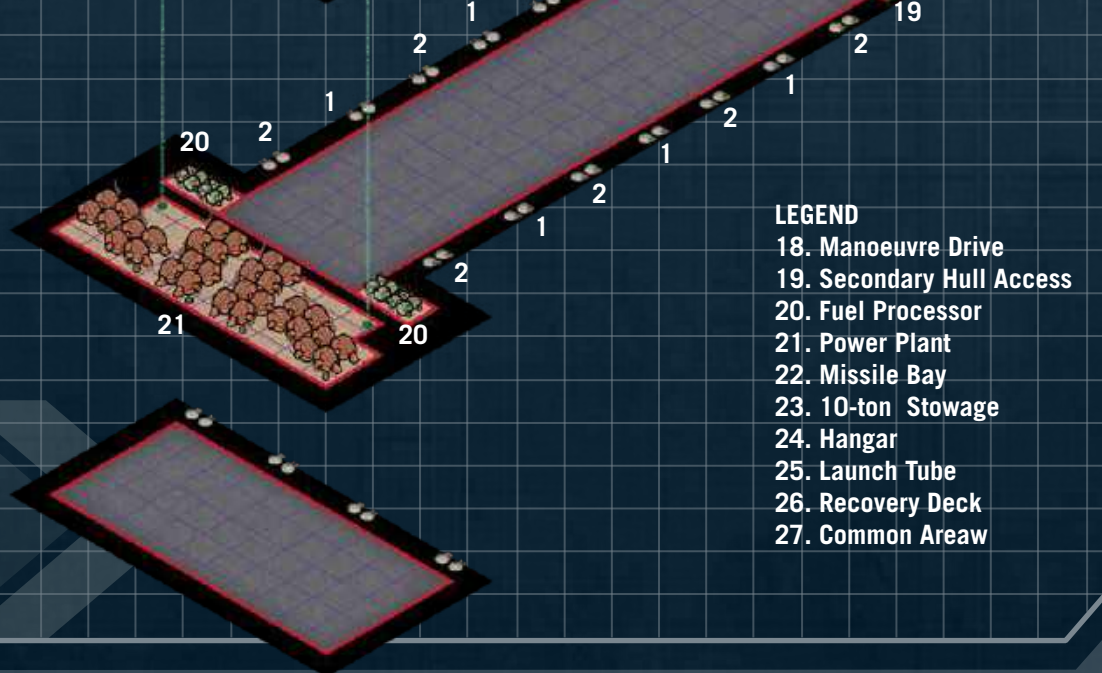
Deck 3



Deck 2



Deck 1



LEGEND

- 18. Manoeuvre Drive
- 19. Secondary Hull Access
- 20. Fuel Processor
- 21. Power Plant
- 22. Missile Bay
- 23. 10-ton Stowage
- 24. Hangar
- 25. Launch Tube
- 26. Recovery Deck
- 27. Common Area

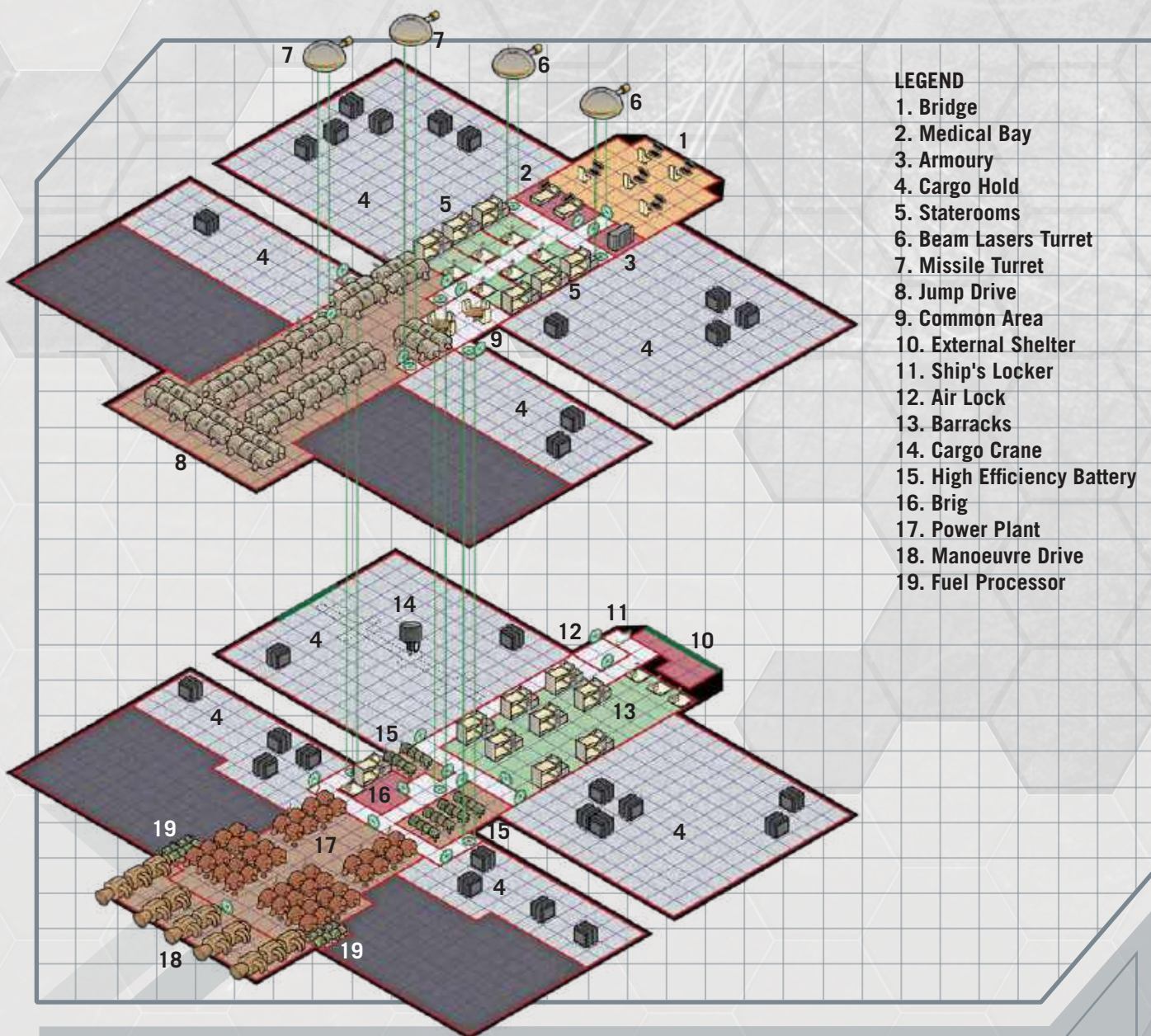
MALLIN CLASS LIGHT TRANSPORT

The *Mallin* class is a common vessel in the FSN region. It is a utilitarian design created to fill one of several niches. It can be fitted out as a non-jump-capable in-system transport or a two-jump-1 commercial vessel using TL10 components. If a TL11–12 jump drive is available the '*Mallin-2*' variant can be put together using an imported drive and controls for it.

Hull form is a rather unattractive 'twin saddle' arrangement with a central cylinder housing command functions at the fore end and drives at the rear, with two broad 'saddles' housing cargo and fuel. The drive chambers are oversized in the basic design, allowing a jump-2 drive to be fitted. The spare space is often turned into storage or living quarters in jump-1 or sublight vessels, since accommodation is extremely tight.

Six cabins are entirely sufficient for a vessel plying between in-system ports or two mainworlds but the extra engineers required by the jump-2 variant makes for a cramped ship. The addition of ground combat personnel in vessels used for raiding requires barracks that make long journeys very unpleasant. Nevertheless these ships are used by many raiding groups, largely because they are cheap and easy to maintain.

Power supply is often a problem in the *Mallin*. The sublight version can get by on its standard power allocation and a jump-1 ship can just barely manage. The jump-2 variant requires the addition of a battery pack or disabling the manoeuvre drive before beginning jump preparations. Vessels that have been upgunned will suffer even worse power issues and may have auxiliary power plants built into the cargo bays.



LIGHT TRANSPORT (RAIDER VARIANT)

MALLIN-2-CLASS

TL10

TONS COST (MCr)

Hull	800 tons, Standard	—	40
M-Drive	Thrust 2	16	32
Jump Drive	Jump 2	65	97.5
Power Plant	Fusion (TL8), power 400	40	20
Fuel Tanks	J-2, 8 weeks of operation	168	0.8
Bridge	Standard Bridge	20	4
Computer	Computer/10 bis	—	0.32
Sensors	Basic	—	—
Weapons	Single Turrets (beam lasers) x2	2	5
	Single Turrets (missile racks) x2	2	1.9
Systems	Fuel Processor (40 tons/day)	2	0.1
	Cargo Crane	4	4
	High Efficiency Batteries (power 160)	4	0.4
	Armoury	2	0.5
	Brig	4	0.25
	Medical Bay	4	2
	Retractable External Shelter (military, 60 tons)	3.6	0.48
Staterooms	Standard x6	24	3
	Barracks (capacity 16)	32	1.6
Software	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
	Jump Control/2	—	0.2
	Library	—	—
Common Areas		6	0.8
Cargo		401.4	—

TOTAL: MCr 214.85

CREW

CAPTAIN, PILOT,
ASTROGATOR, ENGINEERS X4,
GUNNERS X4, MEDIC

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr17904/month

• • • • •

PURCHASE COST

MCr214.85

POWER REQUIREMENTS

160

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

160

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

160

JUMP DRIVE

0

SENSORS

12

WEAPONS

2

FUEL PROCESSOR

1

SYSTEMS

320

HULL POINTS



VALIANT CLASS BATTLECRUISER

The *Valiant* class is not the largest or most potent warship in the fleet of the Grand Republic – that honour goes to the squadron of ‘capital cruisers’ held in reserve for the personal direction of the president – but it is the most potent symbol of the Grand Republic’s might that most outsiders will ever see. Built on an elongated wedge hull-form, the *Valiant* is streamlined, despite it not needing to be, and can land on a planetary surface. This capability is very rarely used but occasionally a battlecruiser will set down at a planetary starport just to remind everyone the Republic is watching.

The heavily armed main hull has a broad central spine, along which are arranged three batteries of superheavy mass driver cannon, each of three turrets. Secondary armament consists of eight batteries, each of two turrets containing a light mass driver cannon mounted on the upper and lower leading edges of the wedge, with pairs of turrets at regular intervals along the whole length. Four torpedo bays are located in pairs, well forward, with the remaining defensive armament scattered across the upper and lower wedge surfaces. This consists of 60 batteries, each comprising a pair of rail gun barbettes and a defensive turret mounting a pair of sandcasters and a beam laser. Rail guns can fire through sand without difficulty, allowing each battery to swap back and forth between short-range point defence fire and offensive action against distant targets.

The hull is heavily armoured, by local standards, and the capital turrets all have their own additional protection. In addition, the command suite is contained within an armoured ‘citadel’ deep in the hull. This is a 240-ton complex containing the main bridge, the command bridge and an area between and around them where the ship’s main data core and administrative offices are located. The command suite has its own small armoury and medical bay, plus independent life support. It has been suggested that this arrangement is more about protecting the captain from mutiny than maintaining combat effectiveness but it serves both functions well. The secondary bridge is located on a tower structure between the ‘B’ and ‘X’ batteries on the main spine, less well protected but with a marvellous view of the stars. This bridge is typically used during peacetime operations and to impress visitors, with the armoured command suite reserved for combat or high-security operations.

Although the *Valiant* can land planetside, most interface work is carried out by a large complement of small craft. These dock in two hangar bays located in the underside of the wedge-shaped hull, with a capacity of 400 tons of craft on either side. Small craft access is not possible when the vessel is grounded but the hangars can be used to deliver vehicles or personnel direct to the surface of a planet. Small craft complement varies

but since the Grand Republic does not favour fighters it usually includes messenger boats, shuttles and small jump-capable craft used as couriers.

Internal layout is based upon three major fore-to-aft ‘arteries’. Two are simply corridors that run almost the whole length of the main hull about halfway from the main spine to the ‘wingtip’. The other is the main spine itself, which has a chain of accessways running from the nose to stern. Right in the centre of the ship is the command suite, which along with the capital turret mountings forms the bones of the ship’s spine by creating a series of structural strongpoints. The main power plant is just aft of the command suite, with the jump drive chambers aft of that. Two subordinate power plants are located one each side in the aft of the main hull wedge, with another small power plant well forward within the spine.

The most critical functions are located deep within the main hull, along the spine, with the flanks given over to hangars, secondary batteries and crew accommodation. The design has proven survivable on the rare occasions one has had to fight, whilst the armament of turreted mass drive cannon can pulverise any known ship other than one of the Commonwealth’s mobile interstellar bases.

Depending on the ship’s current role the crew complement is around 240 personnel, sometimes augmented with a platoon of naval infantry. Accommodation for enlisted personnel is cramped but less so than on some vessels. Bulk accommodation blocks are set up to house 18 personnel with most living in ‘racks’ consisting of little more than a bunk and locker, although a couple more senior personnel in the block have their own private closet-like chamber. Senior petty officers and most officers have a standard stateroom, except the most junior who share. The ship’s senior officers live in luxury, with the captain’s suite rivalling one in a good hotel or liner. The second luxury cabin is surrounded by a diplomatic suite and typically used for impressing local dignitaries when the battlecruiser is not carrying a commodore or political official.

In action, the favoured strategy is to close to decisive range and pound the target to smithereens with mass driver cannon. The high (for the region) manoeuvrability of the *Valiant* allows it to dictate the range of engagement most of the time and to close for a torpedo attack to finish off a crippled opponent. Secondary batteries are considered to be anti-destroyer armament but can do serious damage to a major combatant. The location of the main battery on the dorsal surface allows the hull to shield small craft being launched or rescued, and there have been instances of a *Valiant* simply putting her heavily armoured dorsal surface in the way of enemy fire to shield civilian ships.

The famous painting ‘under the wings of valour’ depicts the battlecruiser *Ardent* doing exactly that during an action off Demshaf, facilitating the escape of much of an

evacuation flotilla. GRS *Ardent* is the only *Valiant* class battlecruiser ever lost in action, although questions are now being asked about the whereabouts of *Resolute*.

BATTLECRUISER

VALIANT-CLASS

TL12		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	30,000 tons, Streamlined	—	1800
	Capital Turret Capability	300	3
Armour	Crystaliron, Armour: 12	4,500	2304
M-Drive	Thrust 4	1,200	2400
Jump Drive	Jump 3	2,255	3375
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 30,000	2,000	2000
Fuel Tanks	J-3, 12 weeks of operation	9,600	—
Bridge	Standard Bridge x2	120	300
	Command Bridge	80	225
Computer	Core/70	—	80
Sensors	Improved	3	4.3
	Life Scanner	1	2
	Shallow Penetration Suite	10	5
Weapons	Large Capital Turrets (superheavy MDC) x9	4,400	1440
	Small Capital Turrets (light MDC) x16	880	832
	Small Torpedo Bays x4	200	12
	Railgun Barbettes x120	600	240
	Triple Turrets (sandcasters x2, beam laser) x60	60	120
	Point Defence Type II	20	10
	Nuclear Dampers x16	160	160
Ammunition	Heavy MDC Munitions (36 tons)	36	—
	Light MDC Munitions (32 tons)	32	—
	Torpedo Storage (24 torpedoes)	8	—
	Sandcaster Barrel Storage (720 canisters)	60	—
	Railgun Penetrator Storage (120 tons)	120	—
Armoured Bulkheads	Command Suite	24	4.8
Systems	Fuel Processor (1,000 tons/day)	50	2.5
	Repair Drones	300	60
	Armouries x20	20	5
TOTAL: MCr 16016.5			

CREW

CAPTAIN, PILOTS X3, ASTROGATOR, ENGINEERS X60, MAINTENANCE X20, MEDICS X8, GUNNERS X112, STEWARDS X12, ADMINISTRATORS X12, OFFICERS X18

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST
Cr1.335/month

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PURCHASE COST
MCr16016.2

BATTLECRUISER

VALIANT-CLASS

TL12		TONS	COST (MCr)
Systems	Brigs x6	24	1.5
	Medical Bays x8	32	60
	Workshops x4	24	3.6
	UNREP System (100 tons/hour)	5	2.5
	Training Facilities x24	24	4.8
	Briefing Rooms x4	16	2
	Hangar (800 tons)	1,600	320
Staterooms	Luxury x2	20	3
	High x6	36	4.8
	Standard x24	96	12
	Bulk Accommodation (capacity 18) x16	384	38.4
Software	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
	Evade/2	—	2
	Fire Control/4	—	8
	Auto-Repair/2	—	20
	Library	—	—
	Advanced Fire Control/3	—	18
	Anti-Hijack/2	—	8
	Battle System/2	—	24
	Electronic Warfare/1	—	15
	Launch Solution/3	—	12
	Point Defence/2	—	12
	Virtual Gunner/1	—	10
Common Areas		500	50
Cargo		200	—

TOTAL: MCr 16016.2

POWER REQUIREMENTS

6,000

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

12,000

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

4

SENSORS

9,000

JUMP DRIVE

50

FUEL PROCESSOR

2,259

WEAPONS

10

SYSTEMS

15,000

HULL POINTS



LEGEND

1. Secondary Bridge
2. Fuel Processor
3. Point Defense Type I
4. Torpedo Bay
5. Power Plant
6. Small Capital Turret
7. Capital Turret and Heavy MDC Storage

1 SQUARE = 50 TONS

WEAPONRY:

Railgun Barbettes & Triple Turrets dispersed across hull

8. DIPLOMATIC SUITE: High Staterooms (3), Stateroom, Common Area, Medical Bay

9. Cargo Hold with UNREP System
10. Repair Drones
11. Command Bridge, Primary Bridge and Sensors

12. COMMAND SUITE: High Staterooms (3), Stateroom, Briefing Rooms (4), Armoury, Medical Bay
13. Medical Bay, Training Facility, Brig, Armouries (4), Workshop

14. Bulk Accomodation, Staterooms (6), Common areas
15. Ammunition Storage (Light MDC Munition, Torpedo, Sandcaster Barrel, Railgun Penetrator)
16. Medical bay, Armoury & Brig
17. Hangar
18. Repair Drones
19. Jump Drive
20. Manoeuvre Drive
21. Nuclear Dampers
22. Air Lock

A P P E N D I X

ALLIES & OPPONENTS

In the course of their adventure the Travellers will meet these characters who are important for what they do and the power they wield, rather than their ability to perform any specific task. The following will be useful to the Referee, however, as the Travellers may find themselves opposed to or relying upon the physical prowess of these characters.

Captain Milena Clayton

STR 5 DEX 6 END 7 INT 10 EDU 8 SOC 5

Skills: Astrogation 1, Carouse, 1, Gun Combat (energy) 0, Leader 2, Persuade 3, Pilot (spacecraft) 1, Tactics (naval) 1, Vacc Suit 0

Weapons: Body Pistol (2D), Laser Pistol (3D+3)

Armour: Cloth (+8)

Clayton has access to a starship and all its resources, including anything she wants from an armoury stocked over years on the frontier. She habitually wears a light stab-proof vest under her clothing and carries at least one body pistol concealed somewhere about her person. When overtly going armed Clayton favours a TL12 Commonwealth-issue laser pistol. This is her service weapon and she is not supposed to have retained it.

Gunmen and Enforcers

STR 8 DEX 7 END 9 INT 5 EDU 4 SOC 4

Skills: Gun Combat (slug) 1, Melee 1, possibly Vacc Suit 1

Weapons: Assault Rifle (3D, Auto 2) or Submachine Gun (3D, Auto 3)

Armour: Flak Jacket (+5)

The Travellers will encounter a variety of gunmen and desperadoes on Grit and at Tradeport and possibly aboard raiding starships too. They are typically armed with basic small arms such as assault rifles or submachineguns and may have light body armour such as a flak jacket. Some are vacc suit qualified but none are likely to be very skilled.

Millard Stevin

STR 9 DEX 6 END 9 INT 8 EDU 7 SOC 6

Skills: Drive 0, Gun Combat 0, Survival 0

Weapons: Knife (1D+2), Hatchet (2D), Shotgun (4D, Bulky)

Stevin is a big, strong lad from a working class background. His ambitions never really grew beyond earning the respect of his father's generation as a reliable working man and he was proud to begin training as a railway engineer. This was more about maintaining track and cutting the forest back than driving trains but Stevin always aspired to be a driver. He is currently armed with a double-barrelled shotgun, a large knife and a hatchet. He is likely to use all of them with enthusiasm and poor judgement if a dangerous situation develops.

Agata Venelle

STR 5 DEX 8 END 7 INT 8 EDU 8 SOC 8

Skills: Admin 1, Diplomat 1

Weapons: Revolver (3D-3)

Agata is an ambitious low-level civil servant. She is in way over her head due to the combination of a laudable desire to help and a conviction that her career will benefit from participating in an expedition to the logging camp. She genuinely wants to help but her experience to date is of solving bureaucratic problems and deflecting complaints from unhappy workers or citizens. She has been given a revolver to defend herself with but, unlike Stevin, she is aware that she has no real idea how to use it. Venelle is not an idiot; she is sensibly dressed and has brought a camera to document the situation, as well as a light pack containing medical supplies and emergency rations. She sees her role in the expedition as that of observer and facilitator, and although scared and out of her area of expertise she will do her best.

TRAVELLER

DEEPNIGHT REVELATION
THE FAR SIDE OF NOWHERE

The Far Side of Nowhere

Far to spinward of any known system the Travellers encounter an enclave of humans and Droyne. They speak familiar languages and have similar customs to the Travellers, but know nothing of the Imperium or its neighbours.

Tradeport

A freeport on the edge of explored space, Tradeport has a dockyard of sorts – and *Deepnight Revelation* needs one. Tradeport is a dangerous place but with the jump drive on the verge of breakdown the Travellers have little choice but to plunge into its turbulent politics.

The Biologicals

The Travellers encounter a mysterious race of what appear to be intelligent plants. Their biological starships are pushing into human-dominated space and conflict seems inevitable. An encounter with the wreck of a human battlecruiser suggests that great danger lies ahead.

The Far Side of Nowhere. Human and Droyne empires thousands of parsecs from Charted Space.



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